

Sūrah Saba'

(Sheba)

Sūrah Saba' is Makkī. It has 50 Verses and 6 Sections

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 9

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي
 الْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿١﴾ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلْجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا
 يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ
 الْغَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ ۖ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي
 لَتَأْتِيََنَّكُمْ ۚ عَلِيمُ الْغَيْبِ ۚ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا
 فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣﴾
 لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ
 كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾ وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّنْ
 رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٥﴾ وَبَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ
 هُوَ الْحَقُّ ۖ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٦﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ إِذَا مُزِقْتُمْ كُلٌّ مِّمَّزِقٍ ۚ إِنَّكُمْ
 لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿٧﴾ أَفَتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ ۚ بَلِ الَّذِينَ
 لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ ﴿٨﴾ أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَىٰ

مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ نَشَأَ نَحْسِفُ
 بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسْفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ ۖ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً
 لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ ﴿٩﴾

Praise be to Allah, to whom belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. And for Him is the praise in the Hereafter. And He is the Wise, the All-Aware. [1] He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out therefrom, and all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends thereto. And He is the Very-Merciful, the Most-Forgiving. [2] And said those who disbelieve, "The Hour (i.e. the Day of Judgment) will not come to us." Say, "Why not? By my Lord, the knower of the Unseen, it will come to you. Nothing in the heavens and in the earth, even to the measure of a particle, can escape Him, nor is there anything smaller than that or bigger, that is not recorded in a manifest book. [3] (The Hour will come,) so that He rewards those who believed and did righteous deeds. For such people, there is forgiveness (from Allah) and a noble provision. [4] And those who strived against Our signs to defeat (the messenger), for such people there is a painful punishment of the divine wrath. [5] And those blessed with knowledge see that what is sent to you from your Lord is the truth and it guides (people) to the path of the All-Mighty, the All-Praised. [6] And the disbelievers said, "Shall we point out to you a man who informs you that, when you are totally torn into pieces, you will certainly be (raised) in a new creation? [7] Has he forged a lie against Allah, or is there a madness in him?" No, but those who do not believe in the Hereafter are in torment and far astray from the right path. [8] Have they not, then, looked to the sky and the earth that lies before them and behind them? If We so will, We would make the earth swallow them up, or cause pieces of the sky fall upon them. Surely, in this there is a sign for a slave of Allah who turns to Him.[9]

Commentary

عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ (the knower of the unseen). This is an attribute of the Rabb (Lord) in whose name an oath has been taken in verse 3. At this place, out of the many attributes of Allah Ta'ālā, the attribute of all-encompassing knowledge and the knowledge of the unseen has,

perhaps, been mentioned particularly because the text is dealing with the matter of the deniers of the day of Resurrection. The major reason why the disbelievers rejected the inevitability of Qiyāmah, the day of doom, was their inability to comprehend how the whole thing would work out. When all human beings die, and become dust, and the particles of this dust get scattered all over the world, they wondered, how would it be possible to collect all these particles, separate the particles belonging to each human being from the particles of all others, and then go on to put the relevant particles back into the frame of everyone's existence? And they took it as impossible because they had very conveniently taken the knowledge and power of Allah Ta'ālā on the analogy of their own knowledge and power! Allah Ta'ālā has told them that His knowledge encompasses the entire universe in a manner that He knows everything in the heavens and the earth to the extent that He also knows where and in what state it is. Not a single particle of what has been created remains outside His knowledge - and this comprehensive and all-encompassing knowledge is hallmark of Allah Ta'ālā. No created entity, whether an angel or prophet, can ever have such an all-encompassing knowledge that no particle of this universe remains outside it. Then, for a Being that has such an all-encompassing knowledge, why would it be difficult to reclaim the scattered particles of a human being from all over the universe, each separate from the other, and reconstitute their bodies from these once again?

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

(So that He rewards those who believed - 4)

This sentence is connected with the earlier one: لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ that is, al-Qiyāmah or the Doomsday is bound to come and its purpose will be to reward believers and to provide for them the best sustenance from Jannah (Paradise). And in contrast to them stand: (5) الَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا i.e. those who made efforts to find faults with Our verses and tried to stop people from believing in them.

The word: مُعْجِرِينَ which appears immediately after the verse cited above means that this effort by them was as if they would render Us helpless in seizing them and would thus go scot-free from having to be present on the last day of Qiyāmah.

The sentence that follows immediately after: **أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْرِ أَلِيمٍ** means that these people shall receive punishment, a severe punishment that will be painful.

Verse 6: **وَبَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ** (34:6) talks about believers in contrast with those who denied the coming of the Qiyāmah. The former had put their faith in it and became the beneficiaries of the knowledge given by Allah Ta'ālā to the Holy Prophet ﷺ by revelation.

Reported in verse 7: **وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ يُنْبِئُكُمْ إِذَا مُرِّقْتُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ** (Shall we point out to you a man...). There is a statement of disbelievers who denied the coming of Qiyāmah. In an exercise of mockery, they used to say, 'come, let us identify an unusual person for your benefit, a person who loves to tell you how, when you die and become dust, totally powdered into countless particles, even after all that, you will be brought into a new creation - and that you, all reshaped into the form you once were, will be made to stand up alive!'

It is obvious that the person alluded to here is no other but the Holy Prophet ﷺ who used to tell people that Qiyāmah will come when the dead will become alive once again, and exhorted people to put their faith in it. All these people who were deriding him knew him perfectly well, but in the present context, they have mentioned him in a manner as if they knew nothing else about him - nothing else but that he tells people about the dead rising alive on the day of Qiyāmah. They had purposely elected to refer to him in that manner just to mock and deride him.

The word: **مُرِّقْتُمْ** (when you are totally torn into pieces) is a derivation from: **مَرَقَ** (*mazq*) which means splitting apart and rendering to pieces, and: **كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ** (*kulla mumazzaq*: (totally torn) means the disintegration of the human body in a manner that all its particles get dispersed separately. Onwards from here, they take up another mode to comment on his statement relating to the Qiyāmah.

They say: **أَفَتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ** (Has he forged a lie against Allah, or is there a madness in him?"- 34:8). The drive of their remark is that the idea that all totally disintegrated particles of the body will stand reassembled together, turn into the human body once again and be alive as well, is so unreasonable, to start with, that there remains practically no question of entertaining or accepting it. Therefore, this claim of the Holy Prophet ﷺ

is either a deliberate attempt to fabricate a lie against Allah Ta'ālā, or the person who says so is insane and no premise of his statement is correct.

The last verse (9): أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ (Have they not, then, looked to the sky and the earth that lies before them and behind them?) carries two chastening messages:

(1) It proves that one can come to believe in the coming of the Qiyāmah by pondering over what has been created in the heavens and the earth, and once the perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā becomes visible through observation, the element of improbability which prohibited its deniers from accepting it could stand removed.

(2) Then, right along with this positive invitation to see and learn on their own, the deniers have also been served with a warning of punishment. They have been told that should they continue to hold firmly to their attitude of rejection and denial, then, they should also realize that it is within this power of Allah Ta'ālā which could make the very same blessings to become a punishment for them, such as, the earth swallows them, or that the sky cracks apart and falls on them.

Verses 10 - 14

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا ۖ يَجِبَالٌ أَوْبَىٰ مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ ۚ وَآلْنَا لَهُ
الْحَدِيدَ ﴿١٠﴾ ۖ أَنْ اْعْمَلْ سَبِغًا وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا ۚ
إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾ ۖ وَلَسْلِمْنَا مِنَ الرِّيحِ غُدُوها شَهْرٌ
وَرَوَّاحها شَهْرٌ ۖ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ ۖ وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ مَن يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ
يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ ۖ وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُم عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ
﴿١٢﴾ ۖ يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَّحَارِبٍ وَتَمَاثِيلٍ وَجِفَانٍ
كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَّسِيتَ ۖ اِغْمُلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ سُكْرًا ۖ وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ
عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكُورُ ﴿١٣﴾ ۖ فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَوْتِهِ
إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنْسَاتَهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا خَرَ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنَّ أَن لَّوْكَانُوا

يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿١٤﴾

And surely We bestowed grace from Us on Dāwūd." O mountains, pronounce with him Allah's purity repeatedly – and you too O birds!" And We made the iron soft for him [10] (saying to him,) "Make coats of armour, and maintain balance in combining (their) rings, and do, all of you, righteous deeds. Surely I am watchful of what you do." [11] And for Sulayman (We subjugated) the wind; its journey in the morning was (equal to the journey of) one month, and its journey in the afternoon was (equal to the journey) of another month. And We caused a stream of copper to flow for him. And there were some Jinns who worked before him by the leave of his Lord. And whoever of them would deviate from Our command, We would make him taste the punishment of the blazing fire. [12] They used to make for him whatever he wished of castles, images, basins as (large as) tanks and big cook-ware fixed (in their places). "Do good, O family of Dāwūd, in thankfulness. And few from My slaves are thankful." [13] So, when We decided (that) death (should come) upon him, nothing gave them any indication of his death, except a creature of the earth that had eaten up his sceptre. So, when he fell down, the Jinns came to know that if they had the knowledge of the Unseen, they would not have stayed (so long) in the humiliating punishment. [14]

Commentary

The preceding verses have addressed the arguments of those who denied the possibility of the life after death, and believed it to be irrational that a person may be revived after he has died and the parts of his body are decomposed and turned into dust. Now the stories of Sayyidnā Dāwūd and Sulaymān عليه السلام have been narrated in the present verses to show that Allah Ta'ālā has already demonstrated His power by the miraculous acts that were deemed by people to be impossible, like making iron as soft as wax, subjugating the wind and making copper as liquid as water.

The word: فضل (*faḍl*) in the opening sentence of verse 10: وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا (And surely We bestowed grace from Us on Dāwūd) means excess, favor or grace. The reference is to particular attributes bestowed on him in excess of others. Allah Ta'ālā has blessed every prophet with some

unique attributes that are considered to be their distinctive excellence. Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام was given a few of his own. Besides being a prophet and messenger of Allah, he was also blessed with power over the world of his time. Then there was his gifted voice. When he was busy with the dhikr of Allah or the recitation of Torah, the birds flying above would converge over him to listen. He was blessed with similar other miracles which find mention a little later.

The word: *أَوْبَى* (*awwibi*) in the direct address appearing next: *يَا جِبَالُ أَوْبَى* (*ya jibalu awwibi*) is a derivation from: *تَأْوَبَ* (*ta'wib*) which means to return or repeat. The sense is that Allah Ta'ālā had commanded the mountains that once Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام starts making Dhikr and Tasbiḥ (the glorification of Allah), the mountains too should start reciting the same words after him.

Similar to this is the tafsir of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه who has explained: *أَوْبَى* (*awwibi*: return, or repeat after) as being in the sense of: *سَبَّحَ* (*sabbihī*: glorify, recite the praise of Allah). (Ibn Kathīr)

This Tasbiḥ (glorification of Allah) the mountains used to do along with Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام is in addition to the universal Tasbiḥ done by the entire creation of Allah that goes on everywhere, all the time, in every age - as said in the noble Qur'an: *وَأَنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ* (And there is not a single thing that does not extol His purity and praise, but you do not understand their extolling - 17:44). The tasbih mentioned here has the status of a miracle shown at the hands of Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام. For this reason, it is obvious that common listeners would be hearing and understanding this Tasbiḥ. Otherwise, it would have just not been a miracle.

From here we also learn that the mountains synchronizing their voice with the voice of Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام and repeating the Tasbiḥ after him was not in the manner sound reverberates, something commonly heard when someone calls inside a dome or well or elsewhere and the voice reverberates or returns. The reason is that the noble Qur'an has mentioned the manifestation of this phenomenon as a special gift and grace bestowed upon Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام. The reverberation of sound is a physical thing. It has nothing to do with someone's excellence. It will work for anyone, even for a disbeliever. At a place where sound

reverberates, his or her voice too will shoot back.

The word: وَالطَّيْرَ (*waṭṭair*: and you too O birds) refers to the phenomenon of birds joining up in the air at his voice and doing tasbih like the mountains - as it has been mentioned in another verse of the Qur'an: إِنَّا سَخَرْنَا الْجِبَالَ مَعَهُ يُسَبِّحْنَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِشْرَاقِ وَالطَّيْرَ مَحْشُورَةً (We had subjugated the mountains to join him (in) making *tasbiḥ* (i.e. pronouncing Allah's purity) at evening and sunrise, and the birds as well mustered together 38:18).

In the last sentence of verse 10 and the first sentence of verse 11, it was said: وَالنَّالَةَ الْحَدِيدَ أَنْ أَعْمَلَ سَبْعَتِ وَقَدِيرٍ فِي السَّرْدِ (And We made the iron soft for him (saying to him,) "Make coats of armour, and maintain balance in combining (their) rings," - 34:10). This is another miracle that iron was made soft for him. Early tafsir authorities - Ḥasan Baṣrī, Qatādah, A'mash, and others - said that Allah Ta'ālā had, by way of a miracle, turned iron soft as wax for him. To make something out of it, he needed no fire, or hammer, or any other tools. The part of the statement appearing in verse 11 goes on to state that the iron was made soft for him so that he could easily make coats of mail with iron. In another verse, it has also been mentioned that Allah Ta'ālā had Himself taught him the making of coats of mail: وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَّكُمْ (And We taught him making of armour as dress for you - 21:80). And what appears later in this very verse 11: قَدِيرٍ فِي السَّرْدِ (and maintain balance in combining (their) rings) also leads to the final stage of training in this craft. The word: قَدِيرٌ (*qaddir*) is derived from: تَقْدِيرٌ (*taqdīr*) which means making on a certain measure while the word: سَرْدٌ (*sard*) literally means to weave. The sense thus released is to make a coat of mail in a manner that its links come out balanced and proportionate without one being small and the other being big, so that it turns out strong as well as looks good when seen. This tafsir of: قَدِيرٌ فِي السَّرْدِ (and maintain balance in combining (their) rings) has been reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه. (Ibn Kathīr)

Special Note

1. This also tells us that the consideration for apparent beauty in man-made things is desirable, since Allah Ta'ālā has given a particular instruction for it.

2. Some early commentators take *taqdīr* in: قَدِيرٌ فِي السَّرْدِ (*qaddir fi 's-sard*: and maintain balance in combining (their) rings) to mean that

there should be a fixed measure of time devoted to this craft, lest most of the time is consumed in that single pursuit causing disruption in duties of 'ibadah and responsibilities of the office and state. In the light of this tafsir, we come to know that people in areas of industry and labor should also spare some time for 'ibādah and personal enrichment while remaining duly organized as far as the necessary management of time is concerned. (Rūḥ ul-Ma'ānī)

The merit and grace of inventing, making and producing things

The verse under study proves that making and manufacturing things of need is so significant that Allah Ta'ālā has taken it upon Himself to teach its mores to His great prophets. That Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام was trained to make coats of mail already stands proved from this very verse. Then, this is how Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was inducted into boat building. He was told: وَاصْنِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا : "Build the boat before Us" [literally, 'with Our Eyes' or 'under Our Eyes'] - 11:37. 'Build before Us' simply means 'build the way We tell you to.' That some other prophets were also taught the making of different things in a similar manner stands proved from some narrations of Ḥadīth. There is a published book with the title of al-tibb al-nabawii attributed to Ḥadīth authority, Ḥafīẓ Shamsuddīn adh-Dhahabi. It contains a narration to the effect that the making of almost all important and necessary things in human life - such as, house-building, cloth-weaving, tree-planting, food-processing and wheel-based conveyances for transportation etc. - was taught by Allah Ta'ālā to His prophets عليه السلام through the medium of wahy (revelation).

It is a sin to take the labourers as low in rank

In Arabia, different people used to go in different professions. No profession or occupation was considered low or disgraceful and no one was taken to be any better or worse on the basis of work, trade, or occupation, nor would brotherhoods and communities rise solely on the basis of occupation. The promotion of the idea of such communities as based on occupation and the attitude of taking some professions low and mean as such was alien there. This was a product of Hindu India. Having lived there with them, Muslims too were influenced by it.

The wisdom of having Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام trained into the making of coat of mail

From a narration of the Ḥadīth authority, Ḥafīẓ Ibn 'Asākir, it has

been reported in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr that during the period of his rule, Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام used to visit bazaars and public places while in disguise and would ask people coming in from different sides as to what they thought about Dāwūd. Since, justice reigned in the kingdom of Sayyidnā Dāwūd, people were living a good life, no one had any complaints against the government of the time, therefore, whoever he asked, the addressee would have words of praise for him and express his gratefulness for the prevailing equity and justice.

It was for his education and grooming that Allah Ta'ālā sent an angel in the shape of a man. When Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام came out on his routine quest for truth, this angel met him. As usual with him, he put the same question to him. The angel said, 'Dāwūd is a very good man and as compared to everyone, he is doing better for himself and better for his people and subjects too. But, he has one habit which, if it were not there, he would have been perfect.' Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام asked, 'What habit is that?' The angel said, 'He takes the expenses on himself and his family from the property of Muslims, that is, from the Baytul-Mal (The Public Treasury of a Muslim State).'

Hearing this, Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام made it a point to immediately turn to Allah subhanahu wa Ta'ālā with self-reproach, lamentation and prayer, saying, 'Teach me to do something for which I have to work with my own hands and support myself and my family with wages from it while working gratis (free, without compensation) to serve Muslims and run their state.' Allah Ta'ālā answered his prayer and taught him the art of making coats of mail and the honor, befitting a prophet, He bestowed on him was that iron was made wax for him so that it became unusually easy for him to earn his sustenance within a short period of time and thus use the rest of his time for 'Ibadah (worship) and obligations of state management.

Ruling

For a Khalifah (Muslim head of an Islamic state) of the time, or a king, or ruler who spends all his time in taking care of state affairs, it is permissible in the Shari'ah of Islam that he takes his average living expenses from Baytul-Mal. But, should there be some other means of livelihood available, then, that would be more desirable - as it was with Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. Allah Ta'ālā had put the treasures of the whole

world at his disposal. Gold, precious stones and everything needed was available to him in abundance. Then Allah Ta'ālā had also allowed him to expend whatever he wished from the holdings of the Baytul-Mal, and according to the verse: *فَأْمُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ* (So, do favour (to someone) or withhold (it) with no (requirement to give) account - 38:39), he was also given the assurance that he could spend in whatever manner he wished and that he did not have to account for it. But, this event came to pass because Allah Ta'ālā, in His wisdom, would have the noble prophets occupy a very high station and, it was after that, that Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام - despite being the ruler of an empire - used to earn his living with his own hands, and was always satisfied with it.

'Ulama' (religious scholars) who serve the religious cause of education and communication (Ta'lim and Tabligh) without remuneration, and the Qāḍī (judge) and Mufti (juri-consult, Muslim jurist highly trained to deliver authenticated rulings on problems and issues for the benefit of the community at large) who spend their time in public service are also governed by the same injunction, that is, they can take their living expenses from the Baytul-Mal. But, should there be some other way to eke out a living - which does not hinder the ongoing religious service being performed - then, that would be better.

Special Note

From this conduct of Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام, whereby he demonstrated the great concern he had to find out the informal, free and totally unfettered opinions of people about his ways of doing things, it is proved that one usually does not know his own shortcomings, therefore, this should be found out from others. The well-known jurist of Islam, Imām Mālik رحمه الله تعالى also paid particular attention to find out what common people thought about him.

We can now turn to verse 12: *وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ غَدُوَهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَّاحُهَا شَهْرٌ* (And for Sulaymān: (We subjugated) the wind; its journey in the morning was (equal to the journey of) one month, and its journey in the afternoon was (equal to the journey) of another month). After having mentioned the blessings bestowed upon Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام, the text refers to Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. It was said that the way Allah Ta'ālā had subjugated mountains and birds for Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام, similarly, the Wind was subjugated for Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. It would take the

throne of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام on which he was seated with a large number of his courtiers to wherever he wished always under his command. Early exegete, Ḥasan al-Baṣri has said that the miracle of the subjugation of the Wind was bestowed upon Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام in return for what he had done once while inspecting his stable of horses. So engrossed he became in this activity that he missed the Ṣalah of al-'aṣr. Since the horses became the cause of this negligence, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام decided to eliminate the very cause of negligence. He sacrificed these horses by slaughtering them (since the sacrifice of horses was also permissible in the law of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام very much like the cows and oxen) and since these horses were owned by Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام, the question of bringing loss to the Baytul-Mal simply does not arise, and the doubt of wasting personal property because of the sacrifice also does not hold good. Full relevant details about it will appear in the commentary on Sūrah Sad (38:30-40, appearing later in this very Volume VII). In short, because Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام sacrificed the horses he rode, Allah Ta'ālā blessed him with a better ride. (Qurṭubī)

In the other part of the verse taken up immediately earlier: **عُدُّوْهَا شَهْرٌ** (34:12), the word: **عُدُّوْ** (*ghuduww*) means moving in the morning and the word: **رَوَاحٌ** (*rawaḥ*) means moving in the evening. Thus, the sense of the verse comes to be that this throne of Sulaymān perched on the wings of the wind from the morning to the afternoon would cover the travel distance of one month, and then, from early evening to late night, that of another one month. In this way, it used to cover the travel distance of two months in one full day.

According to Ḥasan al-Baṣri رحمه الله تعالى, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام would leave Baytul-Maqdis in the morning, reach Istakhr by afternoon and had his lunch there. Then he would leave after Zuhr and by the time he got to Kābul, it would be night. The travel distance between Baytul-Maqdis and Istakhr is something a swift rider could cover in a month. Similarly, the travel distance from Istakhr to Kābul is also what a swift rider could cover in a month. (Ibn Kathīr)

To explain the next sentence of verse 12: **وَأَسْلَمْنَا لَهُ الْفِطْرَ** (And We caused a stream of copper to flow for him), it can be said that Allah Ta'ālā made a metal as hard as the copper turn into a liquid flowing like water, even gushing forth like a stream of water, and was not hot either - so

that, utensils and other things of need could be easily shaped from of it.

Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه said that this stream started flowing as far as it would take a travel of three days and three nights to cover that distance. And this was located in the land of Yemen. Then, in the narration of Mujahid, it appears that this stream started from San'a' in Yemen and continued to flow like a stream of water up to a travel distance of three days and three nights. Famous grammarian, Khalīl Nahwi said that the word: قَطْرَ (*qitr*) mentioned in this verse means molten copper. (Qurṭubī)

The next sentence: وَمِنَ الْجِنَّ مَنْ يُعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ (And there were some Jinns who worked before him by the leave of his Lord - 34:12) is also connected with the ellipsis (محذوف : maḥdhuf) of : سَخَّرْنَا (*sakhhkharna*: We subjugated). The sense is that 'We subjugated for Sulaymān عليه السلام such people from among the Jinns who would do the chores he assigned to them before him - as commanded by their Lord. The addition of the expression: بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ (*baiyna yadaihi*: before him) may, perhaps, be there to make it clear that the subjugation of Jinns was not of the kind mentioned in the Qur'ān where the text talks about harnessing the Moon and the Sun into the service of human beings. Instead, this subjugation was in the nature of mastery over the Jinns who worked before him like vassals busy doing chores assigned to them.

The matter of the subjugation of Jinns

As for the subjugation of Jinns (for Sulaymān عليه السلام) mentioned at this place, it was by the command of Allah Ta'ālā and there can be no doubt about its possibility. Similarly, what has appeared in some narrations about some noble Sahabah that they had Jinns made subservient to them, it was the same kind of subjugation by the leave of Allah with which they were blessed as a Karamah. It was not based on any act or recitation (Wazifah) on their part - as mentioned by 'Allamah Sharbini in Tafsīr As-sirajūl-Munīr under his commentary on this verse. He has cited several events relating to Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah, 'Ubaiyy Ibn Ka'b, Mu'adh Ibn Jabal, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭab, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, Zayd Ibn Thabit and others رضي الله عنهم اجمعين which prove that the Jinns used to be at their service. But, it was nothing but the grace and mercy of Allah Ta'ālā that, like Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام, He made some Jinns subservient to these blessed souls.

But, the particular 'subjugation' through incantations and correlated sets of self-invented actions popular among 'amils or practitioners of this line of activity is something one should take with a pinch of salt and first find out the Islamic rule of guidance in this matter. Qadi Badruddin Shibli al-Ḥanafī who is one of the scholars of the eighth century has written a book, 'Akam- ul-Marjan fi Aḥkām- il-Jann' on this subject. According to him, it is Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام who has been the first one to have the Jinn into his service with the leave of Allah and as a miracle. And the people of Persia attribute this to Jamshaid Ibn Onjahan as being served by the Jinns. Similarly, there are events on record about 'Asif Ibn Barkhiya and others who were connected with Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام which indicate that they too had Jinns subservient to them. Then, the most famous among Muslims are Abū Naṣr Aḥmad Ibn Hilal al-Bukail and Hilal Ibn Wasif attributed to whom there are many unusual events of the subservience of the Jinns to them. Hilal Ibn Wasif has written a full book in which he has put together what the Jinns said to Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام and the pledges Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام took from them.

Qāḍī Badruddīn has written in this very book that generally the 'amils who do their thing to subjugate the Jinns use satanic words of infidelity (Kufr) and sorcery (Seḥr) liked by infidel Jinns and satans. The secret of why they would accept to become their vassals is nothing but that they stand placated by their deeds soaked in kufr and shirk and go on to do a few jobs for them by way of bribe. This is the reason why in doing things of this nature, they would write the Holy Qur'ān with blood and other impurities. Hence, the disbelieving Jinns and satans, pleased with their evil offering, would do what they want them to do. However, about a person named Ibn al-Imām, he has written that he lived during the period of Khalifah Mu'tadid bil-lah and he had subjugated the Jinns through the effective use of Divine Names. As such, there was nothing in his recitations that would go counter to the Sharī'ah. ('Akam-ul-Marjan, p. 100)

In short, if the Jinns get subjugated for someone, without his own intention or motivated action, solely being something from Allah, as it stands proved in the case of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام and some noble Ṣaḥabah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, then, that is included under Mu'jizah

(miracle shown at the hands of a prophet of Allah) or karamah (working of wonder in the nature of a miracle shown at the hands of men of Allah). And such subservience when achieved through bland pragmatism of formula incantations (*'amaliyāt*) would be judged on the basis of its active content. If it contains words of Kufr, or deeds of kufr, it will be nothing but kufr (disbelief, infidelity) - and if it is composed of disobedience or sin only, then, it is a major sin. Then, there are strange words used in such formula invocations and actions. Their meanings are not known. These too have been classed by Muslim jurists as impermissible on the basis that the possibility of such words being loaded with words that contain kufr, shirk and sinfulness cannot be ruled out. In 'Akam-ul-Marjan, Qāḍī Badruddīn has written that the use of words the meanings of which are not known is also impermissible.

And if this act of subjugation be through Divine Names or Qur'ānic Verses and there also be no such sin like the use of impurities in it, then, it is permissible with the condition that the aim thereby should be to remain personally safe against harm caused by the Jinns, or save other Muslims from it. In other words, the aim should be to remove harm, and not to secure benefits, because if it is adopted as a profession to earn money, it amounts to the enslavement of someone created free and to exacting forced labour without remuneration, hence prohibited (*ḥarām*). Allah knows best.

The last sentence of verse 12 is: وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (And whoever of them would deviate from Our command, We would make him taste the punishment of the blazing fire.) Most commentators have taken this to mean the punishment of Jahannam (Hell) in the hereafter. Some others have said that, in this world as well, Allah Ta'ālā had set an angel upon them who, in case they fell short in obeying Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام, would beat them with burning lashes and force them to work. (Qurtubī) The doubt that the Jinns are made of fire after all and the fire would hardly affect them is not worth entertaining here. The reason is that the Jinns are made of fire in the same sense as man is made of dust. It means that the preponderant element of man is dust. Still if man were to be hit by a clod of clay, or stone, it would hurt him. Similarly, the preponderant element of the Jinns is fire. But, pure and potent fire would burn them too.

In verse 13: يَفْعَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَتٍ (They used to make for him whatever he wished of castles, images, basins as (large as) tanks and big cook-ware fixed in their places), there is a somewhat detailed description of the jobs Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام assigned to the Jinns. The word: مَحَارِبَ (*maḥarib*, translated above as 'castles') is the plural form of: مِحْرَابَ (*miḥrab*) and is used to identify the noblest part of the house. When kings and men of authority make a state operation chamber, sort of power niche for themselves, it is also known as mihrab. Then the word: is a derivation from: حَرْبَ (*ḥarb*) meaning war. One makes a seat of power for himself, keeps it safe against being approached by others, and should anyone resort to any high-handedness, he would fight against the aggressor. Given this congruity, the special section of a mansion is called mihrab. Then the masajid or mosques as such are, on occasions, referred to as maharib. When reference is made to the maharib of sahabah from among the maḥarib of Banī Isrā'il and Islam, it means their Masajid or mosques.

The injunction of having a separate place for making a Miḥrab in Masajid

As far as the blessed period of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the rightly-guided Khulafa' is concerned, the custom of making the place where the Imām stands as a separate special unit just did not exist. After the early centuries of Islam, the kings promoted this custom for their security and, among common Muslims, it found currency due to the expedient consideration that the whole row where the Imām stands remains empty. It is in view of the large number of people praying in the congregation of masajid already short on space that only a place for the Imām to stand is made by going in depth toward the wall facing the Qiblah so that full rows could be formed behind him. Since this method did not prevail during the early centuries of Islam, some 'Ulama' have dubbed it as *bid'ah* (innovation in the established religious practice of Islam). Shaykh Jalaluddin as-Suyuṭī has written a regular treatise entitled: I'lam-ul-'Aranib fi Bid'atil-Maḥarib on this issue. However, the correct position in this matter is that, should mihrabs of this nature be made for the convenience of the people praying, and in the best interests of the masjid - without taking it to be the desired Sunnah - then, there is no reason to call it a *bid'ah* (innovation in established religion). Yes, if

this is made to be the desired Sunnah, and whoever does anything against it gets to be censured, then, this excess (*ghuluww*) can make such an action fall under the purview of *bid'ah*.

Ruling

If *miḥrab* is made in the form of a regular place for the Imām to stand and lead the prayers, it is incumbent on the Imām that he stands slightly outside the *miḥrab* in a manner that his feet remain out of the *miḥrab*, so that the place in which the Imām and the *muqtadis* (those praying behind the Imām) can be counted as one. Otherwise, reprehensible and impermissible is the situation in which the Imām stands alone in a separate place and the rest of the *muqtadis*, in another. Some masajid would make a *miḥrab* so spacious that it would be good enough to hold a small row of *muqtadis* within it. In a *miḥrab* such as this, should a row of *muqtadis* also stand in the *miḥrab* and the Imām stands ahead of them, being fully inside the *miḥrab*, then, because of the Imām and the *muqtadis* being on common grounds, the element of *karahah* (reprehensibility) will no more be there.

The next word: تَمَائِيل (tamathīl, translated above as 'images') is the plural form of: تَمَثَال (timthal). It appears in the Arabic Lexicon, al-Qamus, that: تَمَثَال (tamthāl) with a fathah on the letter: التاء (ta') is a verbal noun, and the word: تَمَثَال (timthal) with a kasrah on the letter: التاء (ta') denotes a picture. In Aḥkam-ul-Qur'ān, Ibn-ul-'Arabi has said that timthal, that is, a picture is of two kinds: (1) The picture of animate and living things, (2) that of inanimate and lifeless things. After that, inanimate things are further divided in two kinds: (1) Jamad or inorganic in which there is no increase and growth, such as, rock or soil, (2) nami or organic in which increase and growth go on, such as, trees and crops. The Jinns used to make pictures of all kinds of these things for Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. To begin with, the very generality of the Qur'ānic word: تَمَائِيل (tamathīl: images) lends support to the view that these pictures were not those of some particular kind, instead, were common to all kinds. Then there are the historical narratives in which the presence of the pictures of birds on the throne of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام has also been mentioned.

The prohibition of making and using pictures of the living in Sharī'ah

The cited verse (12) tells us that making and using pictures of the

living was not haram (forbidden) in the Shari'ah of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. But, experience bore out that pictures of people were made among past communities to pay homage to them, then they were put in their houses of worship to serve as reminders of their devotion in the hope that it might enable them too to devote likewise. This did not happen. Gradually, what really happened was that these people made these very pictures the objects of their worship and thus began the worship of idols and icons.

In short, the pictures of the living creatures made in past communities became the conduit of idol-worship. Since it is divinely destined that the Shari'ah of Islam must stay and survive right through the Day of Judgment, therefore, particular attention has been paid there to block the intrusion of the undesirable. Hence, the way sins and initially haram things have been made unlawful, similarly, their conduits and close causes have also been made unlawful by appending these to main sins and haram things. Of crimes, the real one, and the most serious, happens to be shirk and idol-worship. When this was forbidden, the law of Islam did not leave the ways and means that could smuggle idol-worship in it unchecked. It was boldly and wisely checked when the conduits and close causes of idol-worship were also prohibited. Making and using pictures of the living was made prohibited on this very basis. That it is unlawful stands proved on the authority of the aḥādīth of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, aḥādīth that are sound, authentic, and have been transmitted in an uninterrupted succession.

Similarly, when liquor was made haram, also made haram were its buying and selling, wages to deliver or carry it, and its making, everything about it, being the conduits of drinking. When theft was made haram, the very entry in someone's house without permission, in fact, even peeping in from outside the house was prohibited. When zina (fornication, adultery) was made haram, even casting a look intentionally at a non-mahram was also made haram. Comparable examples of it abound in the Shari'ah of Islam.

The prohibition of pictures: A common doubt and its answer

It can be said that the use of pictures during the blessed time of the Holy Prophet ﷺ could have become a source of idol-worship. But, in our time, pictures serve many purposes, such as establishing identity of

criminals, advertising trade marks, meeting friends and relatives, investigating events and circumstances and so many other things. For this reason, it has been included in one of the necessities of life. In this, the apprehension of any idol-worship is far too remote to conceive. As such, this prohibition that was made to offset the danger of idol-worship should now be lifted.

Answer to this doubt is that First of all, it is not correct to say that, in our time, pictures are no more a source of idol-worship. Even today, there are so many sects and groups who worship their peers. Then, it is not necessary either that the wisdom behind an operative divine order should be found in every individual case. In addition to that, the sole reason for the prohibition of pictures is not that it is a conduit of idol-worship. In fact, there are Ṣaḥīḥ (sound and authentic) aḥādīth in which other reasons for this prohibition have also been given. For example, picture making is a duplication of the special attribute of Allah Ta'ālā. The name: *مُصَوِّر* (musawwir: the giver of form, shape, color and real presence) is one of the most beautiful names of *Allah Subḥanahu wa Ta'ālā*, and making of pictures (and the giving of form, shape and presence) is, in reality, befitting for Him and it lies within His power to create among His creations thousands in terms of genus, race, class, category and kinds with millions and billions of living units in each kind, each different in shape. Take the example of human beings. The form and shape of men is different. So is the form and shape of women. There have been billions of individual men and women. None of them were absolutely like anyone else. The distinct features of every person are so manifest that an onlooker would easily recognize him without much hesitation. Who can claim to give the creatures such marvelous shapes other than Allah Almighty? A human being who makes a picture, or painting, or statue of someone living is claiming, for all practical purposes, that he or she too can make (the same) 'images.' Therefore, it appears in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and in other aḥādīth that, on the Day of Judgment, those who make pictures will be told: When you have tried to imitate Us, make the imitation perfect too - if you have the power to do so. We did not simply make an image. We have invested it with a spirit too. If you claim to have 'created' it, then, you better put a spirit inside the thing you have 'made'.

Another reason why a picture is prohibited appears in Ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth

where it is said that the angels of Allah hate pictures and dogs. Angels do not enter the house that has these, because of which, the bliss and radiance of the house is gone, and the ability of the inmates to worship and remain obedient to Allah is reduced. Then, along with it, not so wrong is the well-known saying: خانه خالی را دیو می گیرد (A vacant house is occupied by demons). So, when some house remains unvisited by angels of mercy, who else but the devils and demons will be all over it staying there to sow scruples of sins first and then give the intention and the courage to fall into them.

Yet another reason appearing in some aḥādīth is that pictures are unnecessary embellishment of this world. Of course, in our time, pictures yield many benefits but thousands of crimes, including those that range between immodesty and pornography, also breed and flourish from these very pictures. In short, it is not simply one reason alone that was made basis for its prohibition, rather, there is a host of reasons why the Shari'ah of Islam has declared it prohibited to make and use pictures of the living. Now, if we were to suppose that there is some particular person in whom those causes are not found, then, from this stray incidence, the rule of the Shari'ah cannot change.

According to a narration from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ عنہ appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم has been reported to have said:

أَشَدُّ النَّاسِ عَذَابًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ الْمُصَوِّرُونَ

Of people the most affected by punishment on the Day of Judgment shall be the makers of pictures.

And in some other narrations of Ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم has been reported to have cursed the makers of pictures. Then, a narration from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضی اللہ عنہ appearing in the two Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhari and Muslim reports that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم said:

كُلُّ مُصَوِّرٍ فِي النَّارِ

Every maker of pictures will be in the Jahannam.

This humble writer has put together detailed evidences concerning this issue from the narrations of Ḥadīth and the practice of the early forbears of Islam in his treatise entitled, *At-taswir li-ahkam-it-taswir*.

Also included in it, there are answers to doubts entertained by people. If needed, please consult.

A photograph is also a picture

Some people argue that a photo is outside the definition of taswir or picture, because it is a shadow, or reflection, as it would appear in mirror or water. So, they would argue, the way it is permissible to look at your self in a mirror, in the same way, a photo picture is also permissible. But this argument is absolutely wrong, because a reflection or shadow is a reflection until it has not been made to last through some device. Take the example of mirror or water. Your reflection in it will be gone once you move away from it. If the reflection of this figure were to be made lasting through the use of some chemical process or device, this very thing will become a picture, the forbiddance and prohibition of which stands proved from aḥādīth appearing in an uninterrupted succession. A detailed discussion relating to the issue of photographs has also been included in my treatise on pictures referred to earlier.

The next word: جَفَان (jifan, translated in the text as 'basins') is the plural of: جَفْنَة (jafnah) which means a large dish-like pan or tub to hold ample supply of water, and the word: أَلْجَوَاب (aljawāb, translated above as 'tanks') in: كَالْجَوَاب (kaljawāb) is the plural of: جَابِيَة (jabiyah). A small water tank is called: جَابِيَة (jabiyah). The sense is that they would make water-storing utensils so large as would hold water equal to that of a small tank. The first of the next two words: قُدُور (qudur, translated above as 'cook-wares') is the plural of: قِدْر (qidr) which is spelt with the Kasrah of the letter: القاف (qaf). It means a pot (to boil or cook. The last of the two words: رَاسِيَّات (rasiyat, translated as 'fixed at their place') refers to their state as being set where they were. The sense is that they used to make these cauldrons so huge and heavy that they were virtually immovable - and it is also possible that they would have made these cauldrons fixed on the ovens of solid rock, and therefore they were immovable in that respect. Early Tafsīr authority, Daḥḥāk has given this very explanation of these words.

In verse 13: إِغْمَلُوا أَلْ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُ (Do good, O family of Dāwūd, in thankfulness. And few from My slaves are thankful." [34:13]), after having stated that Sayyidnā Dāwūd and Sulaymān عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام were particularly blessed by Allah Ta'ālā, they and their family and children

have been ordered to remain grateful.

The reality of Shukr (gratitude) and its injunctions

According to Al-Qurṭubī, the reality of *shukr* (gratitude) is that one admits that this blessing has been bestowed by such and such giver and then goes on to use it in consonance with the spirit of his pleasure and in obedience to him. Therefore, using the blessing bestowed by someone counter to his pleasure is ungratefulness and a virtual denial of that blessing. This tells us that the way gratefulness can be in words, it can also be expressed by acts. When expressed by acts, it would mean the use of that blessing in accordance with the pleasure of the giver and in obedience to him. Abu 'Abdur-Rahman As-Sulami has said that Ṣalah is gratitude, fasting is gratitude, and every good deed is gratitude. And Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b al-Qurazi says that gratitude is the name of piety and righteous conduct. (Ibn Kathīr)

In the verse under study, the noble Qur'ān could have used the comparatively brief expression *اُشْكُرُونِي* (ushkuruni: thank Me), but the words used are *إِعْمَلُوا شُكْرًا*. Perhaps this expression is adopted to release the hint that the gratitude expected from the House of Dāwūd was gratitude in practice. (The translation in the text has taken care of this hint by saying, 'Do good....')

This injunction was carried out so faithfully by Sayyidnā Dāwūd and Sulaymān عليه السلام and their families and children, both in word and deed, that no time passed in their homes when they did not have an individual member of the family standing exclusively devoted to worship. In fact, specific time was allotted to all family members for this purpose. As a result, the prayer mat of Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام would not remain unoccupied at any time by one or the other maker of prayer. (Ibn Kathīr)

According to Ḥadīth in al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said that the dearest prayer to Allah is that of Dāwūd عليه السلام. He would sleep half of the night, stand in worship for one third of it, and then, sleep during the last one sixth. And the dearest fasts to Allah are the fasts of Dāwūd عليه السلام, for he would fast on alternate days. (Ibn Kathīr)

It has been reported from Fuḍayl رحمه الله تعالى that following the revelation of this command of gratitude to Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام, he submitted before Allah Ta'ālā: 'O my Lord, how could I show my gratitude

to You fully and sufficiently while my gratitude too, be it oral or practical, is nothing but a blessing bestowed by You? On this too, a separate gratitude becomes due.' Allah Ta'ālā said, اَلَا نَشْكُرُكَ يَدَاوُدُ (Now, O Dāwūd, you did thank Me). The reason was that he had realized his inability to thank Him as was His due, and had made a confession to that effect.

Tirmidhī and Abu Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ report from Sayyidnā 'Ata' Ibn Yasār ؓ that when this verse: اِعْمَلُوا الْاَدَاةَ شُكْرًا (Do good, O family of Dāwūd , in thankfulness) was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ came to the pulpit, recited this verse and then said, "There are three acts whoever accomplishes them would achieve the same excellence as was bestowed on the House of Dāwūd." The noble Ṣaḥabah asked: "Yā Rasūlallāh, what are those three acts?" He said, "Staying firm on justice in states of pleasure and displeasure both; and taking the path of moderation in states of prosperity and adversity both; and fearing Allah both in private and in public." (Qurtubī, Aḥkam ul-Qur'ān, al-Jaṣṣāṣ)

In the last sentence of verse 13: وَفَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشُّكُورُ, soon after having given the command for gratitude with special emphasis, the reality on ground was also pointed to by saying that 'And few from My slaves are thankful.' which is an admonition for a believer, and an incitement to observe gratitude.

The word: مِّنْسَا' (minsa'ah, translated in the text as 'sceptre') in verse 14 beginning with: فَلَمَّا فَصَّيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمُوْتَ (So, when We decided (that) death (should come) upon him, - 14) appears in the sense of staff or pole (as of purpose or authority). Some early commentators have said that it is a word taken from the Ethiopian language and denotes staff. Others have said that it is an Arabic word from: نَسَاء (nasa') which means move back, drive away, postpone. Since a staff or stick is used to remove things undesirable or harmful, therefore, it was called: مِّنْسَاة : 'minsa'ah,' that is, the device to remove. By describing the circumstances of Sayyidnā Sulaymān's unusual death, the text has opened a gateway of many lessons and gems of guidance.

The strange event of the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān ؑ

The elements of guidance embedded in this event are many. For example, Sayyidnā Sulaymān ؑ was a ruler having such an unmatched state at his command that ruled not simply over the world of

his time, but over the Jinns and birds and the wind as well. Yet, despite all these assets at his command, he too had no escape from death, and that it had to come only when the time was appointed for it to come. The construction of Baytul-Maqdis started by Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام and completed by Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had part of it still unfinished. This construction job was entrusted with the Jinns. They were contumacious by nature but kept working in fear of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. If they were to find out that he had died, they would have stopped working instantly and the structure would have been left incomplete. With the leave of Allah, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام made appropriate arrangements to offset this situation. So, when came the time of his death, he got ready for it and entered the *mihrab* (seat of authority in the palace) which was made of sparking transparent glass. His presence could be clearly seen from outside. As was his routine, he stood there in a stance of worship slightly supported by his scepter, so that, once his soul departs (when he dies), the body remains poised at its place with the support of his staff. The soul of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was taken away at the appointed hour, but he kept firmly reclining on his staff and from the outside it appeared as if he was engrossed in worship. In that state, Jinns would not dare come close and peek at him. They kept working under the impression that Sayyidnā Sulaymān was alive. Thus passed a full year and when the remaining work on Baytul-Maqdis was complete, Allah Ta'ālā empowered the termite, (which is referred to by the Qur'ān as دابة الارض (*dābbatul-arḍ*: a creature of the earth), to occupy the staff of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. The termite ate out the wood and weakened the staff. When the staff was gone, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام fell down. That was the time when the Jinns came to know about his death.

Allah Ta'ālā has given the Jinns the capability of traversing very long distances within moments. They used to be aware of many circumstances and events not known by human beings. When they would communicate this information to human beings, they took it to be news from the unseen surmising that the Jinns too possess the knowledge of the unseen (ilm-ul-ghaib). Moreover, the possibility that the Jinns themselves had a claim of possessing the knowledge of the unseen cannot be ruled out. But, this unusual incidence of death unfolded the reality of all that. The Jinns themselves found out - and human beings too - that the Jinns are no

possessors of the knowledge of the unseen. Because, had that been the case and had they been aware of the workings of the unseen, they would have come to know about the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام more than a year ago, and would have been spared of the hard labor they went on doing on the assumption that he was alive. This is what has been stated in the last sentence of the verse:

فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنَّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانَُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ

So, when he fell down, the Jinns came to know that if they had the knowledge of the Unseen, they would not have stayed (so long) in the humiliating punishment. (34:14).

Here, the expression: الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ (*al-'adhabil-muhīn*: humiliating punishment) refers to the hard labor they had to do in completing the edifice of Baytul-Maqdis under the orders of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. Part of this unusual event of the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام has been mentioned in this very verse of the Qur'ān while its details have been reported from several Tafsīr authorities, including Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, and are there in Ibn Kathīr and all other Tafsīrs.

From this unusual event, we also learn the essential lesson that there is no escape from death for anyone and also that Allah Ta'ālā can, when He decides to have someone do something, arrange to have it done the way He wills. This is exactly as it happened during the course of this event when Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was kept, despite his death, standing at his place and the Jinns were made to complete the work assigned to them. This event also shows that all causes and instruments of the whole world keep fulfilling their function until such time as Allah would let them do so. When He would not let them do so, causes and instruments fail, like the support of the staff here that was terminated through the termite. Moreover, soon after the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام, there existed the danger that people, who notice the astonishing performance of the Jinns and come across their apparently unbelievable access to things unseen, might take them as their objects of worship. This danger was also eliminated by this event of death. Everyone came to know that the Jinns were really unaware and helpless in this matter.

From this submission, it becomes clear that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had adopted this particular mode at the time of his death for two reasons: (1) That the remaining work on the construction of Baytul-Maqdis gets to be completed. (2) That people find out the truth about the Jinns, realize that they were really unaware and helpless, and thus there remains no danger of Jinns being taken by them as objects of veneration and worship. (Qurṭubī)

According to a narration of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Amr رضي الله عنه reported by Imām Nasa'ī with sound chains of authority, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "When Sulaymān عليه السلام accomplished the building of Baytul-Maqdis, he made some prayers that were answered. One of these was: O Allah, whoever enters this *masjid* with the sole intention of making Ṣalah (and having no other worldly motive), purify him before he goes out of this masjid, from all his sins (making him) as pure as he was when born from the womb of his mother."

And in the narration of Suddiyy, it also appears that soon after Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام was finished with the building of Baytul-Maqdis, he sacrificed twelve thousand cows and heifers and twenty thousand goats as a token of thanksgiving and declared the feast open to all. Celebrating the day as a day of rejoicing, he stood on the Sakhrah of Baytul-Maqdis praying: O Allah, it is You who bestowed this power, and all these resources, on me by virtue of which the edifice of Baytul-Maqdis reached its completion. Now, also give me the ability to thank you for this blessing; and give me death while adhering to the faith you chose for me; and once you have given me right guidance, let there come no crookedness or deviation in it." And he further supplicated, "O my Lord, for a person who enters this masjid, I ask you of five things:

- (1) Accept the repentance of a sinner who enters this masjid to confess and repent, and forgive his sins.
- (2) Guarantee peace for a person who enters this masjid to remain safe from fear and danger, and deliver him from all dangers.
- (3) Heal the sick person who enters this masjid.
- (4) Make the poor person who enters here need-free.
- (5) Let Your mercy be on the person who enters it as long as he

remains here - except a person who is busy doing something unjust or faithless. (Qurṭubī)

This Ḥadīth tells us that the work of building Baytul-Maqdis was already completed during the lifetime of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. But, the event mentioned above is really not contrary to the possibility that there remained some construction work left out even after the completion of the main building, as is usually done in the case of such huge projects. May be, Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had devised the plan mentioned above for the completion of the remaining work.

It has also been reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام kept standing for a year supported by his staff, even after his death. (Qurṭubī) And according to some narrations, when the Jinns found out that a long time had passed since the death of Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام while they had remained in the dark all along, they tried to determine the time of his death, and for that purpose, they went for an experiment. They released a termite on a piece of wood. Thus, from whatever of the wood was eaten by the termite in one day and night, they calculated that a year had passed over the staff of Sayyidnā Sulaymān in that state.

Special Note

Citing historians, al-Baghawi has said that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام lived for fifty- three years and ruled for forty years. He had succeeded to the throne at the age of thirteen years and had started building Baytul-Maqdis in the fourth year of his reign. (Maḥzarī, Qurṭubī)

Verses 15 - 19

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَيِّدٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتٍ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا
 مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۖ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبِّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾
 فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ
 ذَوَاتَى أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثْلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾ ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَهُمْ
 بِمَا كَفَرُوا ۖ وَهَلْ نُجْزِي إِلَّا الْكَافِرَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ

الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرًى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا
لِيَالِي وَيَأْمَا أَمِينٍ ﴿١٨﴾ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعْدَ بَيْنِ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا
أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

There was indeed a sign for (the community of) Saba' in their home-land: two gardens, on the right and on the left." Eat of the provision from your Lord, and be grateful to Him-- (You have) a good city, and a Most-Forgiving Lord." [15] Then they turned away. So We released over them the flood of the dam, and replaced their two gardens with two gardens having fruits of bitter taste, and tamarisk and some of the lot-trees. [16] Thus We punished them because of their ungratefulness. And We do not give (such a) punishment but to the ungrateful. [17] And We had made towns to be seen between them and between the towns in which We had placed Our blessings, and had measured the journey between them: "Travel along them at nights and days peacefully." [18] Then they said, "Our Lord, make (the phases of) our journeys more distant." And they wronged themselves, therefore We turned them into stories and tore them into pieces. Surely in this, there are signs for everyone who is ever- patient, fully grateful. [19]

Commentary

In previous verses, warning was given to those who denied prophethood and the Day of Judgment and failed to realize that the power of Allah Ta'ālā was most perfect. Reference was then made to miracles shown at the hands of past prophets and mention was made of the events relating to Sayyidnā Dāwūd عليه السلام and Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. Now the text mentions the limitless blessings bestowed on the people of Saba' who were later punished because of their ungratefulness.

The people of Saba' and the particular blessings of Allah upon them

Ibn Kathīr has said that Saba' is the title of the kings and citizens of Yemen. Tababi'ah (plural of *tubba'*) who ruled this country were these very people of Saba', and Queen Bilquīs who has been mentioned along

with Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام in Sūrah An-Naml was also from among these people. Allah Ta'ālā had opened the doors of His blessing on them providing their state with all conceivable comforts. Against these blessings they were asked to believe in one God and obey His commandments and thus be grateful for blessings bestowed on them. For a certain period of time, these people stayed straight with their mandate and kept enjoying ease and comforts. Then came the time when they became so engrossed in the good things of life they were blessed with that they started touching the limits of negligence, even denial. Then Allah Ta'ālā sent thirteen of His prophets to warn them. They did their best to admonish them and bring them round to the straight path. But, these people kept persisting with their attitude of negligence. Then came the consequence. A flood was sent over them, a punishment that devastated their once flourishing city of gardens. (Reported by Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq - Ibn Kathīr)

Imām Aḥmad reports from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that someone asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ if Saba' mentioned in the Qur'ān was the name of a man, woman or some country. The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: This is the name of a man who had ten sons among his progeny. Out of these, six remained settled in Yemen and four migrated to Syria. The names of those who lived in Yemen were: Mudhhiḡ, Kindah, Azd, Ash'ari, Anmar, Himyar (from the progeny of these six sons, there came to be six tribes known by those very names).

And the names of those who settled in Syria are: Lakham, Judham, 'Amilah, Ghassan (tribes coming in their lines were known by the same names). This narration has also been reported by Ḥāfiẓ Imām Ibn 'Abd-ul-Barr in his book, al-Qasd wa al-Amam bi Ma'arifati Ansab-il-'Arab wa-l-'Ajam.

According to Ibn Kathīr's research with reference to scholars of genealogy, these ten sons were not directly from the loins of Saba', rather, they were born in the third or fourth generation of Saba'. After that, their tribes spread out in Syria and Yemen and got to be known by their very names. And the real name of Saba' was 'Abd-ush-Shams. His genealogical tree becomes established by the name Saba' 'Abd Shams son of Yashhab son of Ya'rub son of Qaḥṭan. Historians write that Saba' 'Abd Shams had, during this time, given the glad tidings of the coming of the Last Prophet, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ. It is possible that he

came to know about it from early books of the Torah and Injīl, or from astrologers or soothsayers. He has also composed some lines of poetry in Arabic in which he has mentioned his coming and wished to have been during his time and been of some help to him. Then, he has also exhorted his people to believe in him and support him.

As for the statement of the Ḥadīth quoted above in which it is said that out of the ten sons of Saba', six settled in Yemen and four went towards Syria, this event relates to the time after the coming of the punishment of flood against them which means that these people had scattered towards different directions and cities at the time the flood came. (Ibn Kathīr) Quoting Qushairi, al-Qurṭubī has reported that the period of the people of Saba' is after Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام and before the coming of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and thus it falls in the period known as: فتره (fatrah or gap).

The 'flood of the dam' (sayl al-'arim) and the Dam of Ma'arib (the sadd of Ma'arib)

The word: عَرِم ('arim) in: فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ (So We sent to them the flood of the dam - 16) carries several recognized meanings in terms of Arabic lexical usage and the scholars of tafsir have explained this verse in terms of every such meaning. But, the meaning more in consonance with the context of the Qur'ān is the one that appears in the Arabic lexicons like Qāmūs, Ṣiḥaḥ of Jawhari and others, that is, 'arim' means a dam that is made to block water. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه has also given the meaning of 'arim as dam. (Qurṭubī)

The episode regarding the 'flood of the dam' referred to in this verse, according to the statement of Ibn Kathīr, is that in the country of Yemen, three miles away from its capital, San'a', there was a city by the name of Ma'rib settled in which the people of Saba' used to live. The city was located in between two mountains. Water from rains used to come from the two mountains, leaving the city inundated. The city had the reputation of being a target of such deluges. Rulers of the city (of those, Queen Bilquis has been mentioned particularly) built a strong and fortified dam between these two mountains, a dam that would remain unaffected by the flow of water. This dam stopped the serial surges of flooded water that entered from the two mountains and turned the place into a great big storage of water. Even the water from rains falling on the

mountains started flowing in there. Provided inside this dam, there were three gates at appropriate levels , so that this storage of water could be released systematically for people of the city to irrigate their farms and gardens. To accomplish this objective, they would first open the topmost gate and use water as needed. When no water remained at that level, they would open the gate in the middle and after that came the turn of the third and last gate until came the time of rains next year, and the whole dam would stand filled to the brim all over again. Then, engineered and built under the dam, there was a huge big tank in which twelve outlets of water were provided to supply water to twelve canals serving different parts of the city with water flowing in all canals uniformly and was used to take care of various needs of the city. (Maẓharī)

The slopes of the two mountains to the right and left of the city were landscaped with rows of gardens fed by canals of water. These gardens stood adjacent to each other in two continuous rows by the slopes of the mountains. Though many in number, but the Qur'ān identified them as: جَنَّاتٍ (*jannatan*: Two gardens) because it has taken all the gardens in one row to be one due to their proximity, and then all the gardens on the other side as the other garden.

Trees and fruits of all sorts used to grow in these gardens so abundantly that, according to the statement of the leading early authority, Qatadah, and others, a woman would walk with an empty basket perched on her head, and it would automatically get filled with fruits falling off from the trees without the least need to make use of her hands. (Ibn Kathīr)

The second sentence of verse 15: كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ، ط بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ (Eat of the provision from your Lord, and be grateful to Him-- (You have) a good city, and a Most-Forgiving Lord - 34:15) means that Allah Ta'ālā had ordered them through His prophets that they should make use of their extended means of livelihood provided by Allah Ta'ālā and continue to be grateful to Him through their good deeds and unfailing obedience to Divine injunctions, for He had made that city of theirs a really good city. It had a moderate climate without any extremes of heat or chill, so healthy, clean and bracing - to the extent that there was no trace of any hurting life forms like mosquitoes, flies, fleas, snakes and scorpions anywhere throughout the city. In fact, when travelers from outside would

reach the city - having lice or other harmful parasites in their clothes - these would die off naturally as soon as they arrived there (Ibn Kathīr)

At the end of the verse (15), by adding: *بَلَدٌ طَيِّبٌ* (a good city) along with *رَبٌّ غَفُورٌ* (a Most Forgiving Lord), reference to divine blessings has been made all the more perfect by suggesting that 'this good life is not restricted to the life of the present world, in fact, should you remain consistent with your gratefulness, the promise of greater and more everlasting blessings of the Hereafter also holds good. The reason is simple. He is the creator and master-dispenser of all blessings and the one who sustains you - and should you, at one or the other time, inadvertently fail to be grateful or betray by negligence or shortcoming, Allāh Ta'ālā is a great forgiver too and will forgive your shortcomings.'

In verse 16, it was said: *فَاعْرِضْهُمْ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرَمِ* (Then they turned away. So We released over them the flood of the dam). In other words, 'when the people of Saba' flouted the commandments of Allah through their contumacy and rebellion, despite having such blessings and despite having been warned by the noble prophets, We released a flood from the dam over them.' We already know that 'arim means a dam. This flood was attributed to 'arim for the reason that this very 'arim, a source of security and prosperity, was transformed by Allah Ta'ālā into a source of calamity for them. According to an account of the event given by Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, Wahb Ibn Munabbih, Qatādah, Daḥḥak and other early Tafsīr authorities, when Allah Ta'ālā decided to undo the dam of Ma'rib ('arim) and punish and destroy these people through a flood, blind rats were set upon this great dam, who weakened its foundation and made it hollow. When came the time of rains and the flooding of water, the pressure of water broke through the already weakened foundation creating gaps and crevices in the dam. Ultimately, the water collected behind the dam ran over the entire valley in which this city of Ma'rib was located. Houses collapsed. Trees were uprooted. The water feeding the twin rows of gardens by the mountain slopes was dried up.

It appears in the report of Wahb Ibn Munabbih that it was already predicted in the books of these people that rats will destroy this dam. When people saw rats near the dam, they were alerted by the danger. As a defensive measure, a large number of cats were released under the dam in the hope that they would stop the rats from coming close to the dam.

But, when came the divine decree, the rats overcame the cats and entered into the foundation of the dam.

Then there are historical narratives that also say that as soon as some smart and far-sighted people saw the rats, they decided to leave the place and move to somewhere else. In fact, they made the necessary arrangements and got out of there one by one. Others stayed. But, once came the flood, they too shifted. However, there were many who were swallowed by the flood. In short, the whole city was destroyed. Some details about residents of the city who had migrated to towns in other countries have been given in the Ḥadīth of the Musnad of Aḥmad appearing earlier. Six of their tribes were scattered in Yemen, four in Syria and some of these very tribes came to be the forerunners of the larger population of Madīnah-at-Ṭaiyyibah. Related details appear in books of history.

What happened to the twin rows of gardens after the coming of flood and the destruction of the city? This has been stated in the second sentence of verse 16 as: *وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتَىٰ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ* (and replaced their two gardens with two gardens having fruits of bitter taste, and Tamarisk and some of the lot-trees), that is, their trees that yielded fruit having good taste were replaced by trees that bore fruit having an evil taste. As for the word: *خَمْط* (Khamt), most commentators take it to mean the arak (a pungent, thorny desert tree). The lexicographer, Jawhari says that there is a kind of arak which bears some fruit and which is eaten. But, the fruit that grew on this tree was bad in taste. And 'Abu 'Ubaidah رضي الله عنه said that every tree that is thorny and of bitter taste is called: *خَمْط* (khamt). The next word: *أَثَل* (athl) means a kind of tree that is also known in Arabic as : *طرفاء* (ṭurfa') according to the majority of commentators and both are generally equated with tamarisk in English. No fruit it bears is worth eating. Some commentators said that 'athl' in the sense of samr (Mimosa, Egyptian thorn) or babul or kikar, (Acacia Arabica found in the sub-continent) is a thorny tree the fruit of which is fed to goats.

The word: *سِدْر* (sidr) means beri or ber in Urdu and is translated in English as the lote-fruit or lotus tree in English. Sidr is of two kinds. The one planted on farms bears fruits of pleasant taste (something close to crunchy pears) and carries more of fruits and less of thorns. The other

kind is wild and grows in the form of thorny shrubs and trees with more thorns and less fruits that are bitter as well. At this place, the use of the word: قَلِيل (qalil: little, some) along with (sidr: bair or lote) perhaps indicates that this too was wild which bears less fruit and is bitter. Allah knows best.

The next verse: ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا (Thus We punished them because of their ungratefulness.- 34:17) means that they were punished because they committed kufr. Kufr has two meanings. It could mean ungratefulness and it could mean the denial of the true faith. At this place, both meanings can be applied because they did both. They were ungrateful and they rejected the thirteen prophets sent to them.

Special Note

There are two things here that are likely to raise a question. It has been said earlier that Allah Ta'ālā had sent thirteen prophets to the people of Saba'. Then, it has also been stated above that the event relating to these people and the flood of 'arim or dam transpired during the interim period after Sayyidnā 'Isā عليه السلام and before Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ called the period of fatrah or gap. During this period, according to the majority of Muslim scholars, simply no prophet was sent which is the reason why it is called the period of fatrah or gap. If so, the question is, how can the coming of these thirteen prophets be held as correct? An answer to this appears in Rūḥ ul-Ma'ānī. There it is said that from the event of the flood of the dam ('arim) being in the period of fatrah or gap, it does not become necessary that these prophets too came during that very period. It is possible that the coming of the prophets to these people dates back prior to the period of fatrah or gap while their contumacy and hostility to faith may have increased during the period of fatrah whereupon the punishment of the flood from the dam was sent upon them in the period of fatrah. Allah knows best.

The word: كَافُر (kafur) in the second sentence of verse 17: وَمَنْ نُجْزِي إِلَّا الْكَافِرَ (And We do not give (such a) punishment but to the ungrateful - 34:17) is an emphatic form of: كَافِر (kafir) which means one who is very ungrateful or is an absolute disbeliever. As such, the verse could be taken to mean: 'We do not punish anyone other than the one who is very ungrateful or is an absolute disbeliever.' This, quite obviously, is counter to all those verses of the Qur'an and sound aḥādīth which prove that

Muslim sinners will also receive the punishment of Jahannam (Hell) to the measure of their deed - even though, finally, once they have gone through their punishment, they will be taken out of the Jahannam because of their 'Imān or faith and admitted into Jannah (Paradise). To resolve this difficulty, it has been said that it does not signify punishment in some absolute sense, instead, it means a mass punishment as was sent over the people of Saba'. This one is particular to disbelievers. Such punishment does not befall Muslim sinners. (Rūḥ ul-Ma'ānī)

This finds support in the saying of a Ta'bai Ibn Khiyarah. He said, جَزَاءُ الْمَعْصِيَةِ الْوَهْنُ فِي الْعِبَادَةِ وَالضَّيْقُ فِي الْمَعِيشَةِ وَالتَّعَسُّرُ فِي اللَّذَّةِ قَالَ لَا يَصْدَافُ لَذَّةٌ حَلَالًا إِلَّا جَاءَهُ مَنْ يَنْغَصُّهَا (The punishment of sin is that the sinning person becomes sluggish in acts of worship (*ibādah*) his economic conditions becomes straitened, and enjoyment (itself) becomes hard to bear...' Ibn Khiyarah explained the latter part of his statement by saying, 'When one is blessed with something *ḥalāl* he can enjoy, there comes one or the other reason which spoils this enjoyment'. (Ibn Kathīr) This tells us that the punishments given to Muslim sinners are of this nature. No open punishment hits them either from the heavens or from beneath the earth. That is particular to disbelievers.

And sage Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ لَا يَعْاقِبُ بِمِثْلِ فِعْلِهِ إِلَّا الْكَفُورُ ('Great is Allah and He said it right: The punishment of an evil deed exactly in proportion to it is not given to anyone but the *kafur*' - someone very ungrateful or absolutely disbelieving). (Ibn Kathīr) This is because a believer, who is no *kafur*, receives some concession with respect to his or her sins as well.

An interpretation of the sense of this verse appears in Rūḥ-ul-Ma'ānī with reference to Kashf. There it is said that the statement is made in its real sense. Punishment as punishment is given only to a disbeliever and whatever pain is caused to a believing sinner through things like fire is only an apparent punishment. In reality, the purpose is to cleanse him from sin. This is like heating up gold in a furnace. The purpose is to remove its unwanted sediments. This holds true in the case of a believer as well. If he too is put in Jahannam as a consequence of some sin of his, it will be to burn out those elements of his body that have grown on him from consuming what is haram. Once this is taken care of, he is ready to go to Jannah and it does not take much time that he is taken out of

Jahannam (Hell) and admitted into the Paradise (Jannah).

In verse 18, it was said: *وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرًى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ*.... (And We had made towns to be seen between them and between the towns in which We had placed Our blessings, and had measured the journey between them: "Travel along them at nights and days peacefully. - 18") This verse mentions yet another blessing Allah Ta'ālā had bestowed on the people of Saba'. Then it goes on to refer to the ungratefulness of those people who acted ignorantly and chose to ask for a reversal of this blessing by praying that the thing be made harder and more challenging for them. The statement: *الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا* (towns in which We had placed Our blessings) in this verse probably means the rural areas of the country of Syria, because the reference to the descent of mercy in several verses of the Qur'ān is specifically related to that country. The sense of the verse is that Allah Ta'ālā had made their travels to the towns of Syria very easy for them during their trips they had to undertake for their business. Given the conditions that prevailed in the world of that time, the travel distance between the city of Ma'arib and the country of Syria was fairly long with routes being uneven. In view of this difficulty, Allah Ta'ālā had blessed the people of Saba' by having made for their convenience a series of towns at intermittent distances all the way from the city of Ma'arib to the country of Syria.

These habitations were close by the main road, therefore, these were called: *قَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ* (had measured the journey between them). These habitations appearing one after the other were a source of convenience for weary travelers. If a traveler from one of them left home in the morning, he had the choice of reaching some other town on his way, stop there, have lunch or take rest as he wished and could leave after Zuhr and reach the next stage by sundown and spend the night there. The sentence: *سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ* (Travel along them at nights and days peacefully - 18) means that these habitations were made at distances that were balanced and equal so that they would reach from one to the other within a fixed time.

In the last sentence of verse 18: (Travel along them at nights and days peacefully.), mention has been made of a third blessing bestowed on the people of Saba'. It means that these settlements were located at such equal and balanced distances that a traveler would be able to cover them

in almost identical time. Then the routes were secure. Theft and highway robbery were unknown. One could travel at any time of the night or day without any hesitation or concern.

Verse 19 opens with the statement: فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعْدَ بَيْنِ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ (Then they said," Our Lord, make (the phases of) our journeys more distant." And they wronged themselves, therefore We turned them into stories and tore them into pieces - 34:19). It means that so unjust were these people that they would go to the extent of dismissing the very blessing of Allah placed there to eliminate the hardships of travel, rather went deeper into their lack of recognition and straight ungratefulness by coming forward to pray that their Lord makes the distances they cover in travel longer - hoping that the habitations do not appear at such close distances, and wishing to see some hard areas of a forest or wilderness which ask for some rough traversing as well. Their case was similar to that of the Bani Isra'il. They used to get the excellent sustenance of mann and salwa, all free of cost. Bored with it, they asked Allah to replace it with vegetables and greens. In return for their ungratefulness and lack of recognition for blessings, Allah Ta'ālā released the punishment on them that has been called the flood of the dam earlier. The ultimate consequence of this very punishment has been stated in this verse in strong words, that is, they were virtually expunged from this world leaving nothing but idle tales of their wealth and luxury.

The word: مَزَقْنَاهُمْ (*mazzaqnahum*) is a derivation from: تَمْزِيقٌ (*tamziq*) which means to tear and scatter (a people) or to destroy (a kingdom). The sense is that some of the inhabitants of this city of Ma'arib were destroyed on the spot and some others were scattered in a manner that small groups of them spread out to various countries. This destruction and scattering away of the people of Saba' became proverbial in Arabia. On such occasions, there is an Arab idiom: تَفَرَّقُوا أَيَّامِي سَبَا that is, these people got scattered away as were the luxury-laden people of the Saba'.

Ibn Kathīr and other commentators have reported a long narrative about a soothsayer who had come to know about the coming of the punishment of the flood a little before it actually did. He made a swift and unique plan. First of all, he sold his entire property. When he had the money in his hands, he told his people about the coming flood and exhorted them to get out of the area immediately. He also told them that

those who intend to shift to a safe far-away place should go to 'Amman, and those who have a taste for liquor, pita bread and fruits should move to Busra in the country of Syria, and those who would settle for rides that go through mud, come handy during the time of famine and prove efficient when dashing on a journey, should go to Yathrib (Madīnah) which abounds in dates. His people followed his advice. The tribe of Azd went towards 'Amman, the Ghassān to Busra in the country of Syria and the Aws and Khazraj and Banū 'Uthmān started off in the direction of Yathrib, the home of date palms. After reaching Batn Murr, Banū 'Uthman liked the place and settled right there. Because of this divergence, Banū 'Uthmān were given the title of Khuza'ah. Batn Murr is closer to Makkah al-Mukarramah where they had chosen to settle down. As for Aws and Khazraj, they reached Yathrib and stayed there. After the long narrative in Ibn Kathīr, the same detail about people scattering to different places has been reported on the authority of Sa'id from Qatadah from al-Sha'bi. Thus, says Ibn Kathīr, these people of Saba' were shredded into pieces, people who have been mentioned in: مَرَفَّنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مَمْرَقٍ (We torn them into pieces).

The concluding statement in verse 19: إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ (Surely in this, there are signs for everyone who is ever-patient, fully grateful - 34:19) means that there is a great sign and lesson in the rise and fall and in the radical change that hit the life cycle of the people of Saba' for a person who is enduring and grateful at its best, that is, when faced with some distress or pain, one observes patience over it, and when blessed with things of comfort, one is readily grateful for it. This is a life style in which one always comes out a winner. No matter what the state of his life is, he ends up in nothing but pluses, profits and gains. So says a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari and Muslim where the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said:

'Certainly unique is the state of life a true believer is always in. No matter what Allah decrees for him, it turns for him into nothing but good and profitable. If he is blessed in one way or the other or has the desire of his heart fulfilled, he thanks Allah for it and it becomes good and beneficial for him in the Hereafter. And if he suffers from some pain or distress, he bears it with considered patience for which he is rewarded in a

big way and thus, this suffering too, becomes good and beneficial for him'
- from Ibn Kathīr.

Some commentators have taken the word: صَبَّار (Ṣabbar: very patient) in the general sense of sabr or patience - which includes remaining firm in all acts requiring obedience as well as abstaining from sins. In the light of this tafsir or explanation, a true believer remains comprehensively attuned to Ṣabr (patience) and shukr (gratitude) under all conditions and then, for that matter, every sabr is shukr and every shukr is sabr. Allah knows best.

Verses 20 - 21

وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
﴿٢٠﴾ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُّؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ
مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ ۚ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيزٌ ﴿٢١﴾

And Iblīs has found his assessment true about them. So they followed him, except a group of the believers. [20]
And he did not have any power over them, but for the reason that We should know the one who believes in the Hereafter as distinct from the one who is in doubt about it. And your Lord is Watchful over every thing. And he did not have any power over them, but for the reason that We should know the one who believes in the Hereafter as distinct from the one who is in doubt about it. And your Lord is Watchful over every thing. [21]

Verses 22 - 27

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي
السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ ۖ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ
مِّنْ ظَهِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا
فُزِّعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا الْحَقَّ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ
الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٣﴾ قُلْ مَنْ يَّرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ قُلِ اللَّهُ ۖ

وَأَنَّا أَوْيَاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْفَىٰ ضَلَّالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾ قُلْ لَا تَسْأَلُونَ
 عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ
 يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ ۖ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾ قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ
 الْحَقَّمْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا ۖ بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

Say." Call upon those whom you claim (to be your gods) beside Allah. They do not possess (any thing) even to the measure of a particle, neither in the heavens nor in the earth. They have no contribution at all in either of the two, and He (Allah) has no helper from among them. [22] And intercession before Him is of no benefit, but for the one whom He has permitted. (And those who will ask for intercession will remain fearful) Until when fear is removed from their hearts, they will say (to each other), "What did your Lord say?" They say, "the Truth". And He is the High, the Great. [23] Say, "Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth?" Say, "Allah. And We or you are either on the right path or in open error." [24] Say, "You will not be asked about the sins we committed, and we will not be asked about what you do. [25] Say, " Our Lord will assemble us together, then will judge between us with truth. And He is the best Judge, the All-Knowing. [26] Say, "Show me the ones whom you have associated with Him as partners. Never! He is but Allah, the Mighty, the Wise." [27]

Commentary

These verses are meant to prove the falsity of three different types of idol-worshippers. The first group among them, and the most absurd of all, was of the people who believed that these idols, made of stones are the partners of Allah and His associates in all His powers. The beginning part of the verse 22 refutes their presumption by saying, "They do not possess (any thing) even to the measure of a particle...". The second group of them used to believe that these idols are the helpers of Allah in managing affairs of the universe. The last part of Verse 22 deals with this group by saying, "And He (Allah) has no helper from among them." There was a third group of people who did not hold the idols as gods or helpers of god, but they maintained that these idols are so close to Allah that their

intercession is always approved by Him, and whoever has the advantage of their intercession, his desires may well be fulfilled. Verse 23 has refuted this belief by saying, "And intercession before Him is of no benefit, but for the one whom He has permitted." The sense is that their assumption that idols are close to Allah is not correct. They are neither close to Allah, nor do they have any power of intercession before Him. Then the text clarifies that even angels who are close to Allah cannot intercede for anyone without Allah's permission, and even if they are allowed to intercede, it is not easy for them to do that, because of Allah's awe they have in their hearts. The usual way in which they receive a command from Allah is that they become nervous, due to Allah's awe, when they receive it. Then once they return to their normal condition, they ask each other about the command to ensure its correct nature. This is the sense of the later part of Verse 23 where it is said, "Until when fear is removed from their hearts, they will say (to each other), "What did your Lord say?" They say, "the Truth". [1]

As for angels becoming nervous out of awe referred to in verse 22, its full description is given in a report from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhari. Says the relevant part of the long Ḥadīth report: When a command from Allah Ta'ālā issues forth through the heavens, all angels start flapping their wings in humility and emotional readiness to obey (as if dazed or benumbed of consciousness). When that effect of nervousness, awe and majesty recedes from their hearts, they say: 'What did your Lord say?' Others tell them that He has spoken the truth and that such and such command has come from Him.

And it appears in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim that Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه reports from some Ṣaḥābi that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, 'When our Rabb, may His name be exalted, gives a command, the angels holding the Divine Throne start reciting tasbih (saying glory) for Him. Hearing the tasbih done by them, angels of the next lower level of the heavens follow suit until this chain of glorification reaches the lowest level that is the firmament of the world (making it a simultaneously recited tasbih by angels from all heavens). Then, they ask the angels who are close to the Throne, 'What did your Lord say?' This they tell them. Then, in the same manner, those of the lower heavens ask those of the upper the same

[1] This part is abridged from Khulasa-e-tafsīr. ('Uthmānī)

question until this chain of question and answer extends up to the firmament of the world' - excerpt from a long Ḥadīth. (Maḏharī)

Consideration of the psychology of the addressee in debates and avoidance of any approach that may provoke violent attitude

In verse 24: **وَأَنَّا أَوْ يَأْتِكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ** (And We or you are either on the right path or in open error - 34:24), this address is beamed at polytheists and disbelievers. In their case, what was needed was already done. That Allah Ta'ālā was the creator, the master, and all-powerful in the absolute sense was proved decisively and explicitly. That idols and everything else other than Allah was weak and helpless was demonstrated clearly. After having done all this, the occasion demanded that Mushriks are told in clear terms that they were ignorant and astray in bypassing Allah and electing to worship idols and satans. But, the noble Qur'ān has opted for a wonderfully wise form of address, something that should serve as a guidance for all those who are engaged in the mission of da'wah and tabligh or in debates against opponents of Islam and votaries of the false. It will be noticed that the disbelieving adversaries addressed in this verse were not called kafirs, infidels, disbelievers or the ones gone astray. Rather, a change was introduced in the mode and content of the address. The arguments and proofs were already clear. In their presence, no sensible person could say that tauhid (Oneness of Allah or pure monotheism) and shirk (the attribution of partners in the pristine divinity of Allah) are equally true and that the adherents of both are following the truth. Instead of that, it is certain that one of these two is following the path of truth while the other is in error. Now, it is up to you. You think and you decide as to who is on the side of truth. Is it we or is it you? Had the addressee been called a disbeliever or someone who had gone off the track of truth, it could have made him angry. This approach was avoided. In its place, the approach was kept so affectionate and disarming that it would make even the most diehard adversary left with no choice but to consider what was being proposed (from Qurṭubī and Bayān-ul-Qur'ān)

This method of prophetic call, good counsel and good-mannered debate - in line with the command of the Qur'ān: **وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالِغِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ** (*wa jādilhum bil-latī hiya aḥsan*: (and argue with them in the best manners - 16:125) - is something 'Ulama' should keep in sight all the time. Once this

stands ignored, everything done in the fair name of da'wah, tabligh and debate becomes ineffective, rather harmful. As a result, adversaries turn adamant and cling to their error far more firmly.

Verse 28

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

And We did not send you (O prophet,) but to the entire mankind, as a bearer of good news and as a warner, but most people do not know. [28]

Commentary

That Allah is One and that His power is absolute was the subject in previous verses. In the present verse, it is being said that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was sent as the Messenger of Allah to all peoples of the world who are there now or will come in the future.

The word: كَافَّةً (Kaaffah) in: كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ (Kaaffatal-lin-naas: for all peoples) is used in the sense of making something universal and inclusive of all without the exclusion of anyone from it. The grammatical arrangement of the text required saying: لِّلنَّاسِ (lin-naasi kaaffatan: for the people as a whole) because the word: كَافَّةً (kaaffah: all) is grammatically a hal (adverb) relatable to the word نَاسٍ (naas: people). But, in order to put a clear accent on the universality of the mission of the Last Rasūl of Allah, the word: كَافَّةً (Kaaffah: all) was set to come earlier.

The mission of a messenger or prophet assigned to all prophets sent before the Holy Prophet ﷺ was restricted to some particular people and particular geographical area. It is the peculiarity of the Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ that his prophetic mission is common and open to all peoples of the world. In fact, it is not simply for human beings, but is so for the Jinns as well. And then, it is not just for those who were present during his blessed time, but is universally applicable to all human generations to come right up to the last day of Qiyāmah. And this very fact of the continuity and survival of his mission as prophet and messenger demands that he has to be the Last and Final of the prophets and that no prophet is to come after his appearance. The reason is that

another prophet is sent when the law and teachings of the one before him are distorted or altered. Thus, a second prophet is sent to reform the people and reinstate them according to Allah's pleasure. As for the Sharī'ah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and that of His own Book, the Qur'ān, right through the last day of Qiyāmah, the responsibility of its protection has already been undertaken by Allah Ta'ālā Himself. Therefore, it will hold on and survive till Qiyāmah in its original state and there would be no need for some other prophet to be sent.

According to a narration of Sayyidnā Jabir ؓ appearing in the Ṣaḥīḥs of al-Bukhari and Muslim and elsewhere, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said: 'I have been given five things that have not been given to anyone else before me: (1) That Allah Ta'ālā helped me by placing in my person such an awe as it is felt by the people from the distance of a month of travel. (2) That the whole earth has been declared to be a masjid and a purifier for me (in the religious codes of past prophets, their worship used to be performed only in particular places set up as houses of worship. Worship was not allowed outside their appointed prayer places, either in the open or inside homes. For the Muslim community, Allah Ta'ālā made the whole earth a masjid in the sense that Ṣalah can be made everywhere - and in the absence of water not being available or its use being harmful, the dust of the earth was made tahir or purifier so that it could be used to make tayammum which becomes a valid alternate of wudu). (3) That property from the spoils has been made halal for me. Before me, it was not halal for any other community (among whom the rule was to assemble the war spoils collected from the disbelieving adversary and deposit it at an appointed place in the belief that some fire or lightening would descend from the heavens and burn it, and this act of burning would itself be the sign of the acceptance of their religious war. For the Muslim community, distributing the spoils in accordance with the rule enunciated by the Qur'ān and spending it as needed was made permissible). (4) That I was given the station of the Great Intercession (الشفاعة الكبرى : ash-Shafa'ah al-Kubrā) (that is, when no prophet would dare intercede on behalf of others on the fateful plains of the Resurrection [al-hashr], I shall, then, be given the opportunity to intercede). (5) That before me, every prophet was sent to his particular people - I have been sent as a prophet to all peoples of the world. (Ibn Kathīr)

Verses 29 - 33

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ط وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ صَلِّ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ ۚ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا أَنْحُنُ صَدَدْنَكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَى بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ الْإِيلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ط وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ ط وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِيْ أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ط هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

And they say, "When will this promise (of the Day of Judgment) be fulfilled, if you are truthful?" [29] Say, "You have the promise of a day from which you can neither be late for a while, nor can you be ahead of it. [30] And those who disbelieve say, "We will never believe in this Qur'an, nor in that which was before it." But if you could see when the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord, repulsing words (of blame) to one another! Those who were held as weak will say to the overbearing, "Had you not been there, we would have been believers." [31] Those who were overbearing will say to those weak, "Was it we who stopped you from (accepting) guidance after it came to you? Rather, you were guilty. [32] And those weak will say to those overbearing, "But (it was your) intriguing day and night (that stopped us from accepting guidance), when you were directing us to disbelieve in Allah and to set up rivals to Him." And all of them will conceal (their) penitence when they will see the punishment.¹ And We

[1] They will conceal their penitence from each other, so that they may not face embarrassment before others.

will place iron-collars around the necks of those who disbelieved. They will not be recompensed except for what they used to do. [33]

Verses 34 - 38

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ
كُفْرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَ أَوْلَادًا ۖ وَمَا نَحْنُ
بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾ قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَٰكِن
أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي
تُقَرَّبُكُمْ عِندَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَن آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ۖ فَلُوْثَكُمْ لَهُمْ
جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ آمِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَالَّذِينَ
يَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَجْرًا ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

And We did not send a warner to a township, but said those who lived a luxurious life therein, "We reject what you have been sent with." [34] And they said, "We are superior in riches and children, and we are not going to be punished". [35] Say, "In fact, my Lord extends provision to whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills),but most of the people do not know". [36] And neither your riches nor your children are the things that bring you near Us closely; however, the one who believes and acts righteously (is close to Us). Therefore, such people will have the double reward for what they did, and they will be at peace in the upper chambers (of Paradise). [37] As for those who strive against our signs trying to frustrate (them), they will be arraigned into the torment. [38]

Commentary

The age-old satanic illusion of taking worldly riches and honours as a proof of being loved by Allah

All along the lanes of time since the very beginning, people intoxicated with material wealth and luxury have always opposed the voice of truth and taken a stance of hostility against the prophets and the pious people, except those whom Allah willed otherwise. On top of this,

they also used to argue in favor of their satisfaction with the existing stance against the people of truth by saying: Had Allah disliked our doings and ways, why would He give us wealth, recognition and power in this world? The noble Qur'an has answered it in several verses taking different approaches. The revelation of the cited verses is also related to an event of this nature which provides an answer to this absurd argument.

It appears in Ḥadīth that, during the period of Jāhiliyah, two persons ran a business in partnership. Then, one of them left the place and went to some coastal area. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ was ordained as prophet, and people in Arabia started talking about it, the former business partner then living in a coastal area wrote a letter to his former business partner in Makkah and asked him about his reaction and the reaction of other people against this person claiming to be a prophet. The former partner in Makkah wrote back telling him that no one from among the Quraish had followed him, except that a few people of no consequence, mostly poor and needy, were going for him. The man of the coast left his business behind, came to Makkah and asked his former partner there to tell him the address of the person who claimed to be a prophet. This coastal friend who used to study old scriptures, such as the Torah and the Evangile, presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ and asked him: 'What is it to which you invite people to come?' He told him about the main elements of his da'wah of Islam. Immediately after having heard the da'wah (call) to Islam in his blessed words, he said: أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (Ashhadu annaka rasūlallāh: (i.e. 'I bear witness that you are, without any doubt, the messenger of Allah'). He asked him: "How did you know this?" He submitted: '[As for your call being true, I understood it through my reason, and then the sign of it was that:] Adherents of all noble prophets who have come earlier have, in the beginning, always been the weak and the meek, the poor and needy, people who did not matter much among those they were sent to.' Revealed thereupon was the verse under study: وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا... (And We did not send a warner to a township, but said those who lived a luxurious life therein," We reject what you have been sent with." - 34:34) (Ibn Kathīr and Maḥḥarī)

In this verse, the word: مُتْرَفٌ (*mutraf*, translated above as 'those who lived a luxurious life) has been derived from: تَرَفٌ (*taraf*) which carries the

sense of a life abounding in material assets, ease and comfort. Hence, مُتْرَفِينَ (*mutrafīn*) denotes rich people of a community (who are arrogant and careless about what is right or wrong). The Holy Qur'an is saying in the verse cited above that whenever Allah has sent a messenger, these people intoxicated with their riches and pampered by a life of luxury have always confronted him with a flat denial of his mission.

Quoted in the next verse (35) is their saying: نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَ أَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ which, in effect, means: "We are superior in riches and children, and we are not going to be punished - 35". (Obviously, by it, they meant: If we had been deserving of punishment in the sight of Allah Ta'ālā, why would He give us all this wealth and recognition)? The noble Qur'an gives an answer in the next two verses by saying: ... قُلْ إِنْ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ... ("In fact, my Lord extends provision to whom He wills, and straitens (it for whom He wills), but most of the people do not know". 34:36] And neither your riches nor your children are the things that bring you near Us closely; however, the one who believes and acts righteously (is close to Us) وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ 34:37). The gist of the answer is that having more wealth and recognition in this world, or not having any, is no proof of someone being acceptable or unacceptable in the sight of Allah. In fact, it is in view of creational considerations that Allah Ta'ālā would give, at least in this world, property and wealth in abundance to whomever He wills, and gives less to whomever He wills. He alone knows the creational consideration behind it. But, taking the abundance of wealth and children to be a proof of being acceptable in the sight of Allah is sheer ignorance because, with Him, the criterion of acceptability, approval, support and pleasure is no other but 'Imān (faith) and good deed. One who does not carry these two assets - no matter how much wealth and how many children one has - these cannot make him or her acceptable in the sight of Allah.

This very subject has been taken up in several other verses of the noble Qur'an. In Sūrah al-Mu'minun, it was said:

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

Do they think that by consistently providing them with wealth and children, We are accelerating the (real) good things to them? The fact, however, is that they do not understand (the reality) - 23:55,56.

And the reality is that wealth and children that make man negligent of Allah become a curse for him. Then, in a verse of Surah At-Taubah, it was said:

فَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَيَزَهِّقَ أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

And their wealth and children should not attract you. Allah only wants to punish them with these in this world and that their souls depart while they are disbelievers - 9:85.

In that case, it will end up into the everlasting punishment of the Hereafter. As for punishing through wealth and children right here in this world, it means that they become so involved in and infatuated with wealth and property that they never find the time to think about their ultimate fate or turn towards Allah and 'Ākhirah - the end of which is punishment that will last for ever. Then there are many who have wealth and children both. It is within this world that, for the sake of wealth and children, rather, through the wealth and children, they have to suffer from thousands of distresses and pains. As such, their punishment starts taking effect right from this very world.

According to a narration of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: Allah Ta'ālā does not see you or your wealth. He sees your hearts and your deeds - reported by Aḥmad, Ibn Kathīr)

In the last sentence of verse 37: فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ (Therefore, such people will have the double reward for what they did, and they will be at peace in the upper chambers (of Paradise).- 34:37), mentioned there is the state of the people of 'Imān (faith) and good deeds for they are the ones acceptable with Allah. Whether or not they are recognized in this world, their return in the Hereafter will be double or manifold. The word: ضَعْف (ḍi'f) with a kasrah of the letter: ضَاد (ḍād) (ḍād) is a verbal noun which means 'like a thing' or 'the likes of a thing'. The sense is that the way wealthy people keep amassing their wealth in the worldly life, Allah Ta'ālā would increase the return for His accepted people in the Hereafter many times over. For example, the return for one deed would be ten of its likes, or ten times as much. Then, it is not so restricted either. Granted the person's sincerity in deed and in view of other causes and considerations, the return of one such deed can go up to seven hundred

times. That returns at this high scale would also be given as stands proved from Ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth. It is interesting that this too is not restricted. It could be more than that. In short, these people of faith and good deed shall be residing in the elevated chambers of Paradise in perfect peace and forever shielded against all sorrows.

The word: غُرَفَاتُ (*ghurufat*) is the plural form of: غُرْفَةٌ (*ghurfah*). It denotes a part of the mansion considered distinct and high as compared to other parts.

Verse 39

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۖ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ ۚ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Say, "Surely, my Lord extends provision for whomsoever He wills out of His servants, and straitens (it) for him. And whatever thing you spend, He replaces it. And He is the best of the sustainers. [39]

Commentary

This verse has appeared a little earlier (36) almost in the same words. As obvious, the same thing has been mentioned here, however, it has a difference. At this place, there is an addition of: مِنْ عِبَادِهِ (out of His servants) after: مَنْ يَشَاءُ (whomsoever He wills) and: لَهُ (lahu: for him or whomever) after: يَقْدِرُ (yaqdir: straitens). From the statement: مِنْ عِبَادِهِ (min 'ibadihi: from His servants), it is gathered that this rule of guidance has been put forth for His particular servants, that is, for the believers, and the purpose is to alert people of faith that they should not start loving wealth and comfort to the extent that their hearts choke when it comes to spending at occasions and on rights enjoined by Allah Ta'ālā. As for the earlier verse (36) that carries the same text, it was addressed to disbelievers and polytheists who prided on the worldly assets of wealth and children and declared these to be the proof of their success in the Hereafter. Thus, any discordance between the addressee and the purpose of address stands eliminated. Maulāna Ashraf 'Alī Thanāvi, in his *khulasah* of Tafsir Bayān ul-Qur'ān, has taken the same approach by first adding 'the believers' in parenthesis while explaining this verse.

Another difference between these two verses pointed to by some commentators is that mentioned in the first verse was the distribution of sustenance between different human beings, that is, Allah Ta'ālā gives more of wealth and property to some, and less to some others - all in His wisdom and in the light of universal considerations. And in this verse, only one person and his different states have been mentioned, that is, this one person has, at times, more with him, then, comes another time and the same person has much less as well. The word: لَهُ (lahu: for him) which appears in this verse after: يَاقْدِرُ (yaqdiru: straitens) releases an indication in this direction. This approach too leaves no discordance behind. Rather, the first verse turns out as relating to different individuals and the present verse, to different states of one single person.

The sentence: وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ (And whatever thing you spend, He replaces it. And He is the best of the sustainers.) in verse 39 literally means: 'For anything that you spend, Allah Ta'ālā gives you a return from His unseen treasures - at times, within this world and at times, in the Hereafter and at times, in both.' In things happening around us, we see that water comes down from above, animals and humans use it freely, needs of farms and forests are satiated, and no sooner does that supply of water gets used up, than another supply descends to replenish it. Similar is the case of wells dug for water that, no matter how much water is spent out of these, it stands replenished by nature from other sources of water beneath the bed. Man eats up his food leaving the impression that he has finished it, but Allah Ta'ālā provides him with other food in its absence. Physical exercise burns out calories of food and other workings of nature turn it into energy. In short, whatever man spends out in this world, it is the customary practice of Allah Ta'ālā that He would replace it with something else similar to it. Something happening contrary to this, as an exceptional case, - either to punish one, or for the sake of some other creational consideration - will not be deemed as contrary to this customary Divine practice.

According to a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضي الله عنه in Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Everyday when people rise to see another morning, two angels descend from the heavens and pray: اَللّٰهُمَّ اَعْطِ مَنْفَقًا خَلْفًا وَاَعْطِ مِمَّسْكًا تَلْفًا (O Allah, bless the one who spends [out of what You gave him or her] with its return, and let the one who withholds [what

You gave him or her] find it wasted." And according to another Ḥadīth, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Allah Ta'ālā has told me: You spend on people, I shall spend on you."

There is no promise of a return for spending that is not in accordance with the Sharī'ah

Says a Ḥadīth of Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Good deed is *sadaqah* (an act of charity in the way of Allah). When someone spends on himself or his children and family, that spending too falls under *sadaqah*. It brings *thawab* (reward from Allah). And one who spends to protect his integrity and honor, this too is *sadaqah*. And whoever spends whatever he does in obedience to the command of Allah, He has taken it upon Himself that He will give him its return - except that which is spent in (wasteful, extra to need) building or sinful activity, for there is no promise of a return for it."

After hearing this Ḥadīth from Sayyidnā Jabir رضي الله عنه, his disciple, Ibn al-Munkadir asked him: 'What is the meaning of spending to protect one's honor?' He said, 'There may be a person about whom one apprehends that, should he not give him something, he would go about maligning him in all sorts of ways. In this case, giving to such a person is in order to save one's honor.' (Reported by ad-Darquṭni, Qurṭubī)

With the decrease in the use of something, its production also decreases

The hint embedded in this verse also tells us that as long as the things of use provided by Allah Ta'ālā for consumption of human beings and animals keep being consumed, these keep being replaced by Him constantly. The rule seems to be that the more the consumption of something, the more its production. The multiple uses made of domestic animals like goats, sheep and cows put them high on the list of consumption. They are slaughtered. Their meat is eaten. Then, they are also slaughtered under Islamic legal requirements, such as, the *Qurbānī* or sacrifice, and in *Kaffarat* (plural of *kaffarah* or expiation) and *jinayat* (faults, offences against religious prohibitions). The more they are consumed, the more increased becomes their frequency of production from Allah Ta'ālā. This is common experience everywhere. The number of these animals, despite being under the knife all the time, remains the highest in the world. The number of dogs and cats is not that high,

although the reproduction of dogs and cats should obviously be much more as they produce four or five puppies and kittens in a single pregnancy. A cow or goat delivers two calves or kids at the most. Cows and goats keep being slaughtered all the time. Dogs and cats are (generally) not touched by anyone. But, as far as common observations goes, it cannot be denied that the number of cows, sheep and goats comparatively exceeds the number of dogs and cats. Since the time restrictions have been placed on the slaughter of cows in India, the production of cows has gone down there in that very ratio. Otherwise, every village and every home would have been full of cows that stayed spared from being slaughtered.

Once the Arabs tapered down their use of camels for riding and transport purposes, the usual increase in the populations of their camels has also gone down. Incidentally, what has been said here also helps remove that atheistic doubt usually dished out with reference to the Islamic injunctions of sacrifice saying that it is likely to affect the economy of Muslims adversely.

Verses 40 - 42

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ قَالُوا سُبْحَنَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ ؕ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ ؕ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾ فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُم لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا ۖ وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

And (remember) the Day when He will gather them all together, then will say to the angels, "Is it you that these people used to worship?" [40] They will say, "Pure are You! You are our mentor, not these. Rather, they used to worship the Jinns. Most of these believed in them." [41] So, you have no power today to benefit or harm one another, and We will say to the wrongdoers, "Taste the punishment of Fire that you used to belie." [42]

Verses 43 - 50

وَإِذَا تُلِيَّ عَلَيْهِمُ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصَدَّكُمْ
عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُكُمْ ؕ وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا افْكٌ مُمْتَرٍ ؕ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَمَا آتَيْنَهُمْ
مِّنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ ﴿٤٤﴾ وَكَذَّبَ
الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي ۖ
فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٥﴾ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ
مَشْنًى وَفُرَادًى ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا ۚ مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّنْ جِنَّةٍ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ
لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٤٦﴾ قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِّنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ ؕ
إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٤٧﴾ قُلْ إِنْ رَبِّي
يَقْدِرُ بِالْحَقِّ ۖ عَلَامُ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾ قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِي
الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ ﴿٤٩﴾ قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي ۖ وَإِنْ
اهْتَدَيْتُ فِيمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي ۖ إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

And when Our evident verses are recited to them, they say, "He is nothing but a man who wishes to divert you from what your fathers used to worship." And they say, "This is nothing but a forged lie." And the disbelievers say about the Truth, when it came to them, "This is nothing but an explicit magic." [43] And We did not give them any books that they might study, nor did We send to them any warner before you. [44] And those before them had rejected (the messengers), while these (infidels of Makkah) have not reached even one tenth of what We gave to those (before them). So, they rejected my Messengers. Then (imagine) how was My censure! [45]

Say, "I advise you for one thing only : that you stand up before Allah, in pairs and in singles, then reflect; (you will easily appreciate that) there is no madness in your fellow (the Holy Prophet). He is none but a warner to you in the face of a stern torment. [46] Say, "If I had ever

claimed any reward from you, then it is yours. My reward is with none but Allah. And He is witness over every thing." [47] Say, "My Lord sends forth the Truth. He is the Best-Knower of the Unseen." [48] Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood (has vanished so as it) has no power to produce or reproduce (anything)." [49] Say, "If I go astray, I shall go astray only to my own detriment. And if I follow the right path, it is because of what my Lord reveals to me. Surely He is All-Hearer, Ever-Near. [50]

Commentary

The word: مِعْشَارٌ (*mi'shar*) in verse 45: وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَمَا آتَيْنَهُمْ (while these (infidels of Makkah) have not reached even one tenth of what We gave to those (before them).) has been taken to mean: عُشْر (*'ushr*: a tenth) by some early commentators. Some scholars have interpreted it as: عُشْرُ الْعُشْرِ (*'ushr-ul-'ushr*: a hundredth) while others call it: عُشْرُ الْعِشِيرِ (*'ushr-ul-'ashir*: a thousandth). Obviously, the later has a higher degree of exaggeration as compared to 'ushr or ten. The sense of the verse is that not even a tenth, rather a thousandth, of the worldly wealth, power, blessings of age and health given to earlier communities was received by the people of Makkah. Therefore, they should take lesson from what happened to past communities and the evil end they faced. These were people who invited upon themselves the wrath of Allah when they rejected prophets and messengers and, consequently, when came the actual punishment, their power, bravery, wealth and fortified fortresses could do nothing for them.

Call to the disbelievers of Makkah

In verse 46: إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ (I advise you for one thing only), in order to negate any excuse for the people of Makkah, they have been shown a shortcut to ascertain truth. For this, they had to do just one thing: Stand for Allah, in pairs and singles. 'Standing for Allah' does not mean standing in the physical sense, something like standing up from the posture of sitting or lying. Instead of that, it means having the resolve to show full care and concern for the assignment in sight. Then, by adding: لِلَّهِ (*lil-lah*: For Allah) with the word: قِيَامٌ (*qiyam*: To stand), the purpose is to make it clear that one should start looking for truth with a mind cleansed of previous thoughts and beliefs for the good pleasure of Allah alone, so that previous thoughts and deeds do not obstruct one's way to

an acceptance of the truth. And then, the expression 'in pairs and singles' is not intended to point out a particular number. The sense is that there are two ways of pondering over something: (1) To think it out alone and in private. (2) To consult friends and elders, discuss it with them and then arrive at some conclusion. It is being said here that, 'out of these two methods, you can go by the one you like.'

The conjunction: ثُمَّ (thumma: then) in the next sentence in verse 46: ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا (thumma tatafakkaru: then ponder) refers back to: أَنْ تَقُومُوا (an taqumu: That you stand) appearing earlier in the same verse where the purpose of standing has been spelt out - that is, 'cleanse your mind of all previous thoughts, get ready to act for the good pleasure of Allah, think about the call of the prophet of Islam, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ and decide for yourself whether or not it is true and it does not matter whether you do this thinking on your own and all alone, or you do it by consulting others and arriving at some conclusion following discussions with them.'

Onwards from here, another line of thinking has been suggested: Here is a solitary person, all by himself, with no power or group to back him and no wealth or property to strengthen him. Here he comes proclaiming an article of faith counter to that of his own people, rather that of the whole world, something having taken firm roots over centuries and something they all agree to. Such a proclamation can come only in two forms: (1) Either the person making the proclamation is totally insane who has no idea of his gain or loss and is ready to invite the wrath of his people and all sorts of hardship for him. (2) Or, what he is saying might as well be true - that he is a rasul or messenger from Allah and fears none in conveying and implementing His command.

Now, think hard with an open mind as to which of the two things is the real thing. If you think in that manner, you would be left with no choice but to become certain that he cannot be insane. The entire city of Makkah and everyone in the large tribe of Quraish is aware of his wisdom and character. He has spent forty years of his life among his people. From childhood to his youth, everything about him has been before them. No one has ever found any word or deed issuing forth from him to be counter to reason, wisdom, sobriety and gentleness. And other than the kalimah of: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ : la ilaha il-lal-lah (there is no god but

Allah) to which he invites people, no one can doubt any of his word and deed to be counter to reason and wisdom, even today. Given these conditions, it becomes quite obvious that he cannot be insane. This was established in the next sentence of the verse by saying: **مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِنْ جِنَّةٍ** (there is no madness in your fellow (the Holy Prophet)). Here, the word: **صَاحِبِكُمْ** (*saḥibikum*: your fellow) releases a hint in this direction. It is suggesting that should it be the case of a visitor coming in from outside whose antecedents are unknown and who is heard saying something counter to the belief of a whole people, then, it is possible to call him insane. But, this cannot be true in his case. He is one of you, he lives in your city, he belongs to your brotherhood and abides in your company be it day or night. Nothing he does is hidden from you. In fact, even you yourselves have never cast aspersions against him in that manner before this.

And when the absence of the first situation becomes clear, the second situation stands established that has been mentioned in the last sentence of this very verse (46) as: **إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ** (He is none but a warner to you in the face of a stern torment). It means that his presence among them signifies nothing but that he has been sent there to save people from the severe punishment of the Day of Judgment by warning them of it in advance.

Verse 48: **إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَـٰمُ الْغُيُوبِ** (Say, "My Lord sends forth the Truth. He is the Best-Knower of the Unseen." - 34:48) Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood (has vanished so as it) has no power to produce or reproduce (anything)". It means that my Lord who is the Knower of the Unseen strikes out the false with a throw of the truth (as a result of which the false is destroyed, as it was said: **فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ** : 'and there it is all gone'- Al-Anbiya', 21:18). Literally, the word: **قَذَفَ** (*qadhaf*) means to hit by throwing. Here, the purpose is to highlight the truth as set against the false. Perhaps, there may be a wise consideration behind expressing this phenomenon through the word: **يَقْذِفُ** (*yaqdhifu*: He throws), may be the purpose is to point out to the after effect of the truth prevailing over the false. It appears here in the form of a simile as the throwing of something heavy over something feeble that shatters into pieces. So it happens in the confrontation between truth and falsehood when the later lies shattered. Therefore, it was said next: **وَمَا يُنْدِئُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ** (and falsehood

(has vanished so as it) has no power to produce or reproduce anything) that is, falsehood becomes so incapacitated in the face of truth that it can neither originate anything nor can it bring it back.

Verses 51 - 54

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ فَرَغُوا فَلَا قُوَّةَ وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٥١﴾ وَقَالُوا
 آمَنَّا بِهِ ؎ وَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ التَّنَافُشُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ
 مِنْ قَبْلُ ؎ وَيَقْدِرُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾ وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ
 وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِّنْ قَبْلُ ؕ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي
 شَكٍّ مَُّرِيبٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

And if you could only see when they will be terrified! Then there will be no escape, and they will be seized from a place near at hand. [51] And they will say, " We believe in Him." And how can they achieve it (the faith) from a place (so) far off, [52] while they had rejected it before, and used to make conjectures from a place (so) far off ? [53] And a barrier will be placed between them and that which they desire, as it will be done with the people of their kind who were before (them). They were in a perplexing doubt. [54]

Commentary

According to most commentators, the attending condition described in verse 51: *وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ* (and they will be seized from a place near at hand) refers to the Day of Resurrection (al-ḥashr) from the terror of which disbelievers and sinners will not be able to escape even if they try to do so. In our normal experience in this world, when a culprit runs away, he has to be searched for. Something like that will not happen in the present case. In fact, all of them will be seized from where they are located. No one will have the chance to escape. Others have taken this time to be that of the agony of death, that is, when the time of death comes, they will be terrified and, unable to extricate themselves from the hands of the angels, they will be seized where they are with their soul taken out.

The word: تَنَافُسُ (tanawush) in verse 52: وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَافُسُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (And they will say, "We believe in Him." And how can they achieve it (the faith) from a place (so) far off?) means to pick up something by stretching one's hand. Then, it is obvious that one can pick up only what is near at hand. If it is very far, it will be out of reach. The subject of the verse is that disbelievers and deniers, once they see reality as it is on the Day of Judgement, will say, "We have now come to believe in the Qur'ān, or the messenger of Allah to whom it was revealed." But, they would not know that the time and place for embracing 'Iman (faith) has receded far away from them for the reason that 'Iman is a thing of the life of the mortal world and that alone is what is accepted. The 'Ākhirah (the Hereafter) is not the venue of deeds, the place to act right (*darul-'amāl*). Nothing done there can be taken into account. Therefore, how is it possible that they pick up the great wealth of 'Iman just by stretching their hand for it.

The word: قَذَفَ (*qadhaf*) in verse 53: وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (while they had rejected it before, and used to make conjectures from a place (so) far off) means to hit something by throwing. In the Arab idiom, anyone talking out of his hat having no proof for it is referred to by the expressions: رَجِمَ بِالْغَيْبِ (*rajm bil-ghayb*) and: قَذَفَ بِالْغَيْبِ (*qadhaf bil-ghayb*), that is, this person shoots arrows in the dark which has no aim or target. At this place, the expression: مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (from a place far away) means 'what they say is far from their hearts, that is, they do not believe in it by heart.'

In the last verse (54), it was said: وَجِلَّ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ (And a barrier will be placed between them and that which they desire,) that is, they were not allowed to have it. This description could be true about the Day of Judgment in the sense that these people will be seeking salvation and Paradise but would fail to have it. Then, it could also apply to the time of death in the world, that is, they wished to have worldly wealth that was made to stay away from them by the barrier of death.

The word: أَشْيَاعَ (*ashya'*) in: كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ (as it will be done with the people of their kind who were before (them). They were in a perplexing doubt.) is the plural form of: شَيْعَهُ (*shi'ah*). One who is a follower of someone and thinks alike is called a shi'ah or partisan of that person. The sense is that the punishment of having been deprived of what they

wished to have was no other but a punishment that had already been given to people like them who indulged in doings their disbelief prompted them to do. The reason was that they were deep in doubt, that is, they did not believe in the prophethood of Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa ﷺ nor did they have the certitude of and faith in the Qur'ān being the Divine word. And Allah is Pure and High and He knows the best.

Alḥamdulillāh
The Commentary on
Sūrah Saba'
Ends here